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THOMAS
THE IMPOSTOR

THOMAS
THE IMPOSTOR
A STORY

BY
JEAN COCTEAU

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LEWIS GALANTIÈRE



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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Thomas the Impostor is a small book. Take care not to be contemptuous of its size. Great and small are terms without essence. A Tanagra is beautiful; the Victor Emmanuel Monument in Rome is not. Proportion, not distance, lends enchantment. The proportions of Thomas are perfect. The swinging balances of this tale are delicately poised. To remove a single line is to destroy the equilibrium of the book. For this reason, I shall not quote from it. Besides, we learned in Barrie's introduction to another little masterpiece, to The Young Visitors, how irritating it may be to find all the nuts and raisins picked carefully out of the cake.

Thomas is a fairy-tale. It happens to be a "war book." Believe me, it is no less beautiful for that. Indeed, the war of itself is no more an integral part of the story than Guillaume

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Thomas's heart, which had to beat until the tale ended. I mean that no element of a fiction is important except in relation to the other elements. It was inevitable that our hero be identified with the war, just as it was inevitable that Pinchwife bring his rustic young woman to London. The first combination made Thomas the Impostor a story; the second made "The Country Wife" a play. Had there been no war, Guillaume Thomas would have lived and died without the magnificence in which his memory is now clothed; no London, and Mrs. Pinchwife would have continued in innocent imbecility with her husband.

In reality (a curious locution), another view is possible. Wycherly's Mrs. Pinchwife is as passionate as Shakespeare's Juliet, and she might conceivably have found another Mr. Horner on the English countryside. And Cocteau's Guillaume Thomas is so dazzling a figure that he might have stood out from the crowd in any circumstances. Yet, if Cocteau

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had created different circumstances, this boy of sixteen years would have been by so much changed as the hypothetical circumstances differed from—I was going to write the actual—let us say the war. The matter is one of credibility, of conviction. Every character, every scene, every note, in Thomas the Impostor is credible.

Guillaume Thomas despised reality and feared it. He was in love with the shining falsehoods which his imagination saw as verities. The war developed, deepened, his instinct to lie, but it made him, also, a heroic boy-actor and, with the Princess de Bormes, one of the two most appealing characters in French fiction. It is worthy of remark that this liar, as all right-thinking people must unreservedly call him, does not commit a single base action throughout the story, never displays himself to be ignoble in thought or in words. Even more extraordinary is the fact that he is a hero without heroics, a gentleman and yet always a child. He, as well as Madame de Bormes

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and her daughter, is a person whom the terrible Madame Valiche might hate but could not despise. . . .

Of Jean Cocteau, much might be said, but I am certain that he would not wish you to be obliged to hurdle the high barrier of his story in order to come to that of Thomas dit de Fontenoy. He is past thirty years of age and, as he said recently, is better known than his writings. I count fourteen titles in a recent list of his published work, which does not include a number of ballet scenarios and an adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet." In America he is identified with "les Six," a group of young composers which, although it was never cohesive and has ceased to exist, was "protected" by Erik Satie and animated by Jean Cocteau. It is also known that he sponsored the opening of a Paris bar to which he gave the name of one of his pieces. Beyond this, little is known of him in America, and not much more in France,

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where his name is, nevertheless, familiar to everybody.

He has often been confused with les jeunes, and erroneously so. Cocteau stands apart from his contemporaries. They are jealous and afraid of him; he is decently courteous to them. In le Secret professionnel, Cocteau wrote: "There are no æsthetic groups; there are contagious individuals." He is such an individual, a choreagos and a meneur de jeu, too. He is a magnet, but he is also a leader, though no despot. Many young men have revolted against his leadership, prompted by personal exacerbation. They have not always been wise in this. To be in revolt (I do not mean now against Cocteau) is not necessarily to be in the zeitgeist, as we were not afraid to say before July, 1914. To be effectively in the spirit of one's time, one must continue a classical tradition. Such a continuation is not always recognized. Cocteau continues la Princesse de Clèves, Adolphe, la Chartreuse de Parme. Look into the little book from which I have

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already quoted. *"Whoever insists upon modernism at any price, whoever astounds the public by a debauch of colors and surprises on the old canvas instead of weaving a new cloth, will be obliterated by progress."* In an interview published last year, he said with that illuminating penetration which is his: *"It is a serious error to mistake pastiche for tradition. A work can become classic only at the price of not having been so. It changes everything. Do you believe that a painting by Picasso is not in the direct line of Chardin, Corot, and Ingres?"* Simply said, but something to remember. For my part, I believe that *Thomas the Impostor*, in which I find poetry and intelligence, wit and measure, grace and freshness and dignity, as well as a superior technical competence, is in the "direct line" of classic French fiction.

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THE war began in the greatest disorder. This disorder never ceased from the beginning to the end. For a short war might have ripened, so to speak, and dropped from the branch, while a war prolonged by strange interests, attached by force to the branch, afforded renewed occasions for amelioration which were so many beginnings and so many schools.

The government had just left Paris, or, in the naïve formula of one of its members, had gone to Bordeaux to organize the victory of the Marne.

This victory, explained as the result of a miracle, is miraculously simple to any one who

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has been to school. The idlers always carry off the palm when something occurs to prevent the plodders from following out blindly the plan they have made. At any rate, this perennial disorder, the conqueror of solid order, was none the less disorder. It was favorable to extravagant ideas.

The daughter of one of the high dignitaries of the Republic had, in the tranquillity of Paris, transformed Doctor Verne's sanitarium into a Red Cross hospital. That is to say, the lower floor of this old and magnificent town-house on the left bank of the Seine had been transformed, while the rest was left to the civilian patients. She had employed in this work of charity a zeal which was chilled only by the departure of the government. She excused herself, explaining to the doctor that she was obliged to follow her father, although she was past the age of obedience.

She went off, leaving the hospital with its beds and instruments in the hands of the surgeons, the volunteer nurses, and the nuns.

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Doctor Verne was a hypnotist. The first-rate specialists attached to his establishment afforded an excuse to neglect his numerous patients. Verne, who was suspected of drinking, used to lock himself up part of the day in his office, a former concierge's lodge giving on to the courtyard, and there he would hypnotize the inmates.

"Limp," he would order one. "Cough," another was commanded. Nothing diverted him more than these ridiculous phenomena. He had tricked almost all the inmates into sleep, and the patients, thereafter under his influence, became his victims. They knew he was queer, but they were ignorant of his mania. He visited them daily, stopping only to look at their temperature charts and to pronounce from room to room the few sentences of a head waiter going from table to table.

Verne's house was the old Joyeuse mansion in the rue Jacob. The building, flanked by new wings, stood between a round courtyard and a garden. Through the wide-open, ground-

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floor rooms could be seen the garden—a lawn and flower beds. Thus to the sad façade which overwhelmed the incoming patient there succeeded the charming surprise of trees.

In one of the rooms whose woodwork was intact but whose walls had been painted to conform to the rules of hygiene lay the daughter of the Princess de Bormes. This young girl had recently undergone an operation for appendicitis. The princess, wishing to be near her, occupied the next little room.

Madame de Bormes was perforce one of the few people of her class who had remained in Paris after the departure for Bordeaux. She congratulated herself secretly upon having a motive which held her in the capital. She had not believed that Paris would be taken. She had not believed it because it was the fashion to believe it, and, as happens nine times out of ten, her rebellious turn of mind gave her second sight. She was none the less consid-

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ered to be mad and, on the very morning of the departure, her friend Pesquel-Duport, director of *le Jour*, a daily paper, having begged her in vain to transport her daughter to Bordeaux, had exclaimed that she stayed out of perversity and in order to hear the fifes play Schubert's march.

Her true motives were of a different order.

The Princess de Bormes was a Polish woman, widowed in her youth when the prince died of an accident while hunting, two years after their marriage. Poland is the land of pianists. She played with life as a virtuoso plays the piano, and drew from all things the effect which great pianists draw from mediocre music as easily as from the most beautiful. Her duty was pleasure.

Thus, this excellent woman used to say: "I don't like poor people. I detest invalids."

It is not astonishing that such words should scandalize.

She lived to amuse herself and knew how to be amused. She had understood, unlike the

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women of her milieu, that pleasure is not to be found in certain things but in the fashion in which one takes all things. This attitude requires a sound constitution.

The princess was past forty. She had the bright eyes and the face of a little girl which boredom withered instantly. Therefore she fled it, seeking the laughter that women avoid because it gives them wrinkles.

Her health, her taste for life, the singularity of her fashions and of her activities won her a frightful reputation.

In reality, she was purity, nobility itself. This was what mystified people to whom nobility and purity are divine objects whose use is sacrilege. For the princess used them, tamed and supplied them, and gave them a new luster. She deformed virtue as elegance deforms the lines of a stiff coat, and beauty of soul was so natural to her that it was not remarked in her. In the same way, then, as ill-dressed people judge elegance, she was judged by a hypocritical world.

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She was born under the sign of adventure. Her mother, with child, abandoned, madly in love, had harnessed herself to the pursuit of the guilty man, who had disappeared months before. She had discovered him in a little Russian town. There, against a door through which a dialogue was heard and at which she dared not knock, this woman in love died of fatigue and pain, bringing a daughter into the world.

Clémence, the daughter, grew up in the company of a drunken servant. On the death of her father, a cousin took her in charge. But this mute, savage child, who protected herself instinctively with her shoulder, blossomed suddenly like the wand of the fakirs. The stupefied cousin saw her, after a ball, become turbulent. She grew, bloomed, flourished, inside and out. She was a veritable devil and the organizer of all the youthful revels.

Finally, four days after meeting the Prince de Bormes, a diplomatist and traveler, she became engaged to him. The prince was be-

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witched. She saw, beyond him, France and its capital. Paris seemed to her the only theater worthy of her début.

A certain time always elapses before the first spurt of sincerity is stifled, before the public freezes, becomes afraid of having displayed too much heart, and of having let itself be taken in.

The princess profited at first from the surprise caused by her appearance on the scene.

Little by little she shocked people by her ease and her astounding tactics. She touched things which are not touched, opened things which are not opened, spoke on the tight-rope in the midst of an icy silence. Everybody hoped she would break her neck.

After having diverted, she disturbed. She entered society as a young athlete might enter a club, shuffle the cards, and announce that the game was football. The old players (old or young), stunned by such audacity, rise from their armchairs. They fall back into them quickly and are offended with him.

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But if this character, so high in relief and in color, offended some, it enchanted others. These others were the few, those whom Montesquieu wished to seat as judges in court.

So, from one imprudence to another, Madame de Bormes worked her sieve with cleverness, discouraging the mediocre and retaining only those of quality. Seven or eight men, two or three great-hearted women, became her intimate friends. They were precisely those whom an intriguing woman would have wished to have and would have been unable to attract. The others dissembled their feelings because of the prince. After he died, they formed a furtive cabal. The princess saw in this cabal a means of struggle and of displaying her strength. She laughed in the face of battle. She plotted with her staff.

She was reproached with a lack of respect for her weeds. But she had scarcely loved the prince, and to play the part of an inconsolable widow was repugnant to her. The prince had left her a daughter—Henriette.

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Henriette inherited from the prince the beatific admiration which had paralyzed him in the presence of Madame de Bormes. Clémence was born an actress, her daughter an audience, and her favorite spectacle was her mother.

After all, the most beautiful spectacle in the world was this woman who attracted the supernatural and about whom one would have said angels flew as birds about a bird-tamer. If she was tormented by her thoughts, the atmosphere became stifling. Her radiation was felt, whatever it was.

This woman, who was contemptuous of the first place at festivities, sought the best place. They are generally not the same. At the theater, she strove to see, and not to be seen. The actors loved her.

Immediately, the war seemed to her a theater of war—a theater reserved to men.

She could not make up her mind to live on the edge of what was taking place; she saw herself excluded from the only spectacle which

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was thenceforward to count. That is why, instead of deploring the circumstances which kept her in Paris, she blessed them and thanked her daughter. Paris was not the war. But alas, it came close, and this intrepid nature listened to the cannon as at a concert we listen to the orchestra behind a door which the ushers forbid us to open.

In this thirst for war, the princess was as little abnormal as possible. The blood, the fever, the dizziness of bull-fighting held no attraction for her. She thought of them with disgust. She pitied all the wounded without distinction. No: she was madly in love with fashions, frivolous or significant. Danger was in fashion; she was dying of tranquillity. Youth spent itself prodigally to the point of throwing itself from windows; she stamped with inaction. She could have wished that events might help her, sustain her, as a crowd helps a woman to see fireworks.

Such great treasures are not understood.

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They go in suspicion. The miserly world accuses you of striking false coin.

In these circumstances, the spy-fever accused Madame de Bormes of being Polish, that is to say, a spy.

She was welcomed in the rue Jacob. She profited thereby. Her genius quickly put her on the trail of an ingenious means to take part in the events.

The lower floor of the house was an ambulance hospital, but an empty one. She imagined filling it. A convoy would have to be organized; cars and volunteer drivers would have to be recruited; passes would have to be procured in order to go up to the front and bring back as many wounded as possible. She dangled the cross of the Legion of Honor before the eyes of the doctor, who became her accomplice, sounded the "Clear the decks for action!" in this Sleeping Beauty hospital, shook it from its torpor of chloroform, and exalted the patriotism of the X-ray man's wife. Piece by piece, she built a vast machine.

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Most difficult of all was to find cars and drivers. The princess could not get over it. She had thought that a quantity of people desired to live at top speed and see close-ups of death. Finally, she collected eleven machines, including her own limousine and the hospital ambulance.

She had taken in at a glance the advantages of the squabble, then at its height. It was at the time when the old uniform, on the road to the new, had become unrecognizable. Each person modified it to please himself. And this moulting, funny enough in town, was superb at the front: an avalanche of *sans-culottes*.

The princess had guessed at our astonishing revolutionary victory on the roads strewn with champagne bottles, chairs, and mechanical pianos. It must be admitted that she was less able to imagine the masquerades, the artificial teeth, the swollen bellies, the nauseous gases of death, and the fact that soon the hunter and the game were to become plants, face to face,

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Siamese twins united by a membrane of mud and despair.

She scented glory as a war-horse scents battle. She flew in the wake of our troops. She pawed impatiently under her white headdress. She left her daughter's room thirty times a day and came back to tell of her progress.

The dignified court of honor, its pavement invaded by grass, was no longer recognizable. Motors purred. Cars backed into one another. Chauffeurs shouted. The princess dragged Verne at her skirts, casting the play.

You remember Colonel Renard? He built a model dirigible as comfortable as a home, fireplace and all. Ready to fly, he sat before the fire, beside his wife at her knitting, and called out "Loose the ropes!" The balloon rose ten centimeters from the ground and fell brutally back. Just so, the convoy was unable to leave on the appointed day. It lacked a red pass.

After a visit of cajolery to the Invalides,

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Madame de Bormes thought she had obtained the open sesame to the war. She had brought away a reporter's pass, good as far as Juvisy.

The disappointment was so much the greater because the convoy had started off at dawn in the midst of the applause of the milk peddlers and the hospital help. It had to go back over the road three hours later, its tail between its legs, and its head hanging.

But the impetus had been given; nothing could interrupt it. The princess recommenced her visits to the authorities and the courtyard presented once again the aspect of a factory.

Strange mushrooms sprung up in the cracks of this courtyard.

The storm of the war had its fauna and its flora which were extinguished with the peace.

Madame Valiche was a specimen of these.

Taken with the drama from other motives than those of the princess, she had offered her services to the convoy as head nurse. She

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brought with her a bad dentist, Doctor Gentil, whom she presented as a surgeon. She was as ugly, as vulgar, as rapacious as Madame de Bormes was beautiful, noble, and disinterested. These two women met on the field of intrigue. Only, one intrigued for her pleasure, the other for her profit.

Madame Valiche saw in this confused war excellent troubled waters, a fishing-ground of miraculous recompense. She loved Doctor Gentil and pushed him forward. To this motive, she joined a diseased taste for atrocity.

The princess confounded this enthusiasm with her own. She was soon to perceive the profound difference between them.

Madame Valiche was the widow of a Colonel who had died of fever in Tonkin-China. She used to tell the story of his death and of the adventures of the coffin which she had transported with her to France. The coffin, badly chained to the crane which swung it off, had finally fallen into the water. She consoled her-

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self with the dentist. He had almond eyes, a black beard, a yellow face.

This couple lived in surgeon's apron and barracks cap. Madame Valiche had sewn stripes on her lover and herself. She followed Clémence into the War Office where her cheek and her armbands accomplished wonders.

But despite so much grace on the one hand, and so much astuteness on the other, the convoy remained an ideal, giving splitting headaches to the sick and causing the hospital to look like a ministry.

It was this noisy and encumbered courtyard that was seen one afternoon through the wide open gate, by a young soldier passing in the street. He stopped, leaned against one of the posts, and threw upon the confusion the look with which Bonaparte must have regarded the political clubs of the Revolution. After hesitating a long moment, he went in and mingled with the chauffeurs.

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He seemed so young that his uniform gave him the air of a child of the regiment. But what rendered his youth incredible was a narrow noncommissioned officer's stripe on the sleeve of his little blue tunic. His face, fresh, rosy, and well formed, recommended him more quickly than any credentials.

At the end of ten minutes, he was helping everybody and knew everything. He even knew that General d'Ancourt, the only occupant of one of the rooms on the ground floor, had been brought in the day before. The general was a friend of the chief surgeon, and the surgeon had persuaded the Buffon Hospital to give him up. His leg would have to be amputated. He was delirious. His friend held out small hope.

Going from group to group, the young soldier finally encountered Doctor Verne who, with the princess, was drawing up a list of the members of the association.

"Who are you?" Verne asked with his habitual brusqueness.

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“Guillaume Thomas de Fontenoy,” he answered.

“Related to General de Fontenoy?”

This general was then much in the public eye.

“Yes. His nephew.”

The effect of the reply was immediate for the doctor never lost sight of his cross. It guided him as the Star had guided the Magi.

“The devil!” he exclaimed. “Do you belong to our outfit?”

“I am,” said the young man then, “secretary to General d’Ancourt. Unhappily, he has no need of my services, and I fill my time as well as I can without going too far away from him.”

“But you are sent from Heaven!” the princess cried. “Even if the general is saved, he will have months in bed. I enlist you. I am your general.”

While Verne saw his cross growing, Clémence had a vision of the thousand resources of the magical name. This woman who could not

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see a trap six feet in front of her could look into the future. Once again she saw clearly.

Guillaume Thomas, in spite of the doubter's name he bore, was an impostor. He was not the nephew of General de Fontenoy, nor in any way related to him. He was born at Fontenoy, near Auxerre, where some historians place the victory of Fontanet, won by Charles the Bald in 841.

When war was declared, he was sixteen years old. He raged and cursed his age. A grandfather who had been a sea captain had bequeathed to him a taste for escapades. He was an orphan and lived in Montmartre with his aunt, a pious old maid who let him run wild, was busy with the salvation of her own soul, and worried very little about the souls of others.

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Having already found in lying the ante-chamber to adventure, Guillaume pretended to be older than he was, told the neighbors he was about to enlist, that he would obtain special permission, and appeared one fine day in uniform. The uniform had been given to him by a friend.

Under cover of this disguise, the young scamp loitered about the barracks and the gates of the Invalides.

He said to his aunt, "I am studying for the School of Fire." Everything was so gloomy, so troubled, that people believed whatever they were told.

By degrees he arrived at the point reached by all children at play. He believed in the game. He pinned on a stripe.

Nobody arrested him. He was not afraid. He felt proud whenever civilians turned to look as he passed. One day, when he showed to an auxiliary cyclist a family paper bearing the name of Fontenoy, the cyclist thought he was named Thomas de Fontenoy, and asked

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him the same question as Verne. He answered affirmatively for the first time, and thereafter this title was included among his playthings.

You see from what a race of impostors our young Guillaume springs. A special place must be made for them. They live half in dream. Imposture does not declass them; rather does it raise them above class. Guillaume deceived without malice. What follows will show that he was the dupe of himself. Like any child, he believed himself to be that which he was not: sometimes coachman, sometimes horse.

He would have been greatly astonished if any one had demonstrated to him that he risked imprisonment.

To explain his curious immunity, one incident among twenty similar occurrences may be cited.

Guillaume was crossing the Place des Invalides with Madame Valiche. He was mad about firearms. In his belt he carried an issue

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revolver. He wore a barracks cap and one of Doctor Gentil's Red Cross armbands, each adorned with a gold stripe.

A captain stopped him. This was their dialogue:

"Say, there!"

"Captain?"

"What do you call that outfit? Are you wearing a revolver and an armband?"

"But, captain—"

"And that cap. What do you call that?"

"It's a Cyr cap, sir."

"What! Are you at Saint-Cyr? I don't like to be made fun of. What's your name?"

"Thomas de Fontenoy, captain."

"De Fontenoy? Are you related to the general?"

"His nephew, captain."

"They say he has turned the German left flank."

"It's true, captain."

"Look here! Just between you and me, I know that all kinds of crazy outfits are being

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worn, but don't put on an armband *and* a revolver. Choose one or the other. Because," said this warrior paternally, "you've run into me this time, but you might run into a boob."

The princess drew Guillaume, as of right, into the merry-go-round. She was never again without this talisman. In forty-eight hours she secured that which she had been trying to obtain for four weeks. The name of Fontenoy never lingered in the waiting room. Guillaume was scolded, his ear was pinched, he received little slaps, and he carried away the permit.

A private was even detailed to the convoy, who knew the passwords and was to accompany it on its trips, seated beside the driver of the first car. This car held Madame Valiche and the dentist; then followed the princess, and behind her came the others as they pleased. Their drivers included a haberdasher, a writer, and an idler.

They left at eleven in the evening.

What complicated still further the craziness

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of this cast of characters was that Madame de Bormes's driver, who had received his army orders, had been replaced by a poor Russian painter who spoke very little French and was a chauffeur only through love. The princess helped him occasionally. He adored her. He drove badly. But there was no need to drive swiftly, and he had only to follow the leading car.

Madame Valiche and Doctor Gentil, who had never owned a car, enjoyed this promenade and felt that they were on the road to fortune.

They straightened their legs across the boxes of dry biscuits, oranges, and Cordial-Medoc which Madame de Bormes was taking to the wounded. They stretched their arms, stroked their stripes, and kissed at every culvert. At each outpost the cars were stopped.

"Who goes there?" A menacing shadow barred the road. The private, a mechanical toy, jumped from his seat, spoke into the ear of the shadow, resumed his seat, and the con-

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voy continued, ambled along the hillsides, ran through ruined villages.

An absurd interlude occurred when Madame de Bormes, who shared her automobile with Guillaume, saw through the back window of her car the hospital ambulance lighted up like a show window in the rue de la Paix. Doctor Verne was out beside the chauffeur and, alone in the light, the X-ray man's wife, who was suspected of being Verne's mistress, was sitting straight up on a pile of pillows.

She was playing at being an angel. Her eyes half shut, a smile on her lips, one hand on the commutator, she appeared and disappeared at will as they crossed the countryside.

Madame de Bormes asked Guillaume to lean out and shout to the doctor to put out the light. It was perilous to play at angel in these parts, where the possession of the smallest lamp was as much a court-martial offense as if one were a spy.

Clémence and Guillaume understood one

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another. They glued their noses to the window like avid children before a pastry shop.

They entered into the wings of the theater. The stage came nearer, and they peered into the solitude, trees to right and left, the night encumbered with cannonading. Were they not like those melomaniacs in the pit listening to Stravinsky and hanging over a black gulf?

The interminable trip did not weary them. They withstood the brown odor of the charnel house, the monotonous sound of the crashing horizon.

Soon this sound would cease to resemble that of a door heard from the fifth story. It would shake the car, envelop it in gleaming light. The princess and Guillaume, each within himself, longed hopefully for the great moment.

What mysterious law gathered together like quicksilver a Guillaume, a Madame Valiche, and a Princess de Bormes? Their spirit of

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adventure ran from the corners of the world to rejoin itself.

Suddenly, the leading car took a crossroads and stopped. They could distinguish a fence and pilasters. What was happening? Something simple. Verne had a place in the environs of Paris. He wanted to take out a hundred-odd pots of geraniums to it. Without a word to the princess, whose sarcasm he feared, he had filled the cars secretly with pots and had arranged with Madame Valiche to make this great detour.

Therefore, instead of getting near to the lines, they were going away from them.

When the Princess de Bormes learned of this trick she was beside herself. The doctor unloaded his geraniums. She seized him by the sleeve. But as she was about to burst into reproaches, he turned toward her a face so comical that she burst into laughter. He was wearing goggles whose rubber frames gave

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him a Greek profile. This laughter saved him. The princess could not conquer it. She returned to her car to laugh until the tears came. The crazy laughter lasted while the doctor and his acolytes carried in the pots. It had subsided when Verne appeared in confusion to make his apologies. Then it broke out afresh.

“There,” thought Guillaume, “is a woman with whom one can get along.” She was of his kind. He pitied his pious aunt. “Do you believe in God, Madame?” he asked her. “Yes,” Clémence answered, “above all when I am afraid. In a railway train, for example.”

They reached M—— at dawn.

The steep street was filled with people. Already the bishop, in ceremonial attire, was active. He left this street only for his chair. He was ambitious; he loved pomp and honors. Therefore, he never lost a tittle of his glory.

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This theatrical being stood there, his gown raised high, showing his violet calves as if the departed German flood had left pools behind.

He had galvanized the town, choked off the mayor, and he reigned like a captain on the bridge of his ship.

The women kissed his amethyst, the men awaited his orders. Handsome and swollen, he was a fabulous fuchsia.

On the passage of the procession that cut through his town, he frowned and made an easy mental note of the cars. The princess would have been glad to receive his blessing, but Gentil was a freethinker. He did not even believe in table-tipping, as did Madame Valiche, who thought his incredulity was absolutely marvelous.

"Monster," she would say; "you don't believe in anything."

"Wrong, Madame," the dentist would reply in a voice of contempt; "I do believe. I believe in the vibrations of the ether."

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The bishop seemed to them ridiculous.

"He gets into an evening gown at the crack of dawn!" exclaimed Madame Valiche.

"Happy days, Dominus vobiscum, amen," muttered the doctor while their automobile led the others under the wrathful eye of the great old man.

You may pass up a town; you cannot pass up a bishop. They paid for their negligence the day after the next. For the moment, the most perturbed member of their party was a seminary priest. He was looking for a brother from whom he had had no news, and he had been permitted to accompany the convoy. He tried to crouch down into the back seat of the last car, but the eagle eye of the bishop caught him as they passed and counted all the buttons on his cassock. He felt himself lost. Madame Valiche was reminded of him. "Poor vobiscum," she said to the dentist, "he must be feeling pretty sick." She called all priests vobiscum. But the dentist was asleep. Madame

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Valiche put a shawl over him and took his dead hand in hers.

The sky was pink. The cocks crowed. The cannon shook the windows. The slope, the smoke, the caissons, the horses, were pink. On the edge of a field of pink beets, dragoons crouched. Others, in their undershirts, were scrubbing themselves clean. The passage of these women stupefied them. The princess, who waved her hand, saw for a long time their pink, round-eyed faces and open mouths.

“The wings,” said she to herself. “These are the actors, the extras, getting into costume.”

From apple-tree to apple-tree, from outpost to outpost, they arrived at a hamlet where the wounded were being brought in under a round tent which rose over the village square like a circus. Madame Valiche’s car stopped. She was not looking for the battle; she was after its victims.

Young doctors welcomed the unexpected re-

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inforcements agreeably, though with some surprise. A box was opened, bottles were distributed, and the Commandant was notified. The Commandant looked at these civilians with displeasure. He refused roughly to give up the wounded that the Princess de Bormes requested.

“No, Madame,” he declared. “Straw is the luxury of the wounded. They don’t need anything else. And anyway, *leave the wounded alone*. They are to be the *encumbrance* of this war.”

All the members of the convoy listened without daring to speak. The princess was ready to give it up. But vulgarity will tame vulgarity. The Commandant was responsive only to it. He hated the charm of Clémence. Madame Valiche conquered him. She slipped in Guillaume’s name with extraordinary cleverness. The Commandant became another man. His aides relaxed. He refused to give up his wounded but he allowed sweets to be given to them, and he permitted the dressing of their

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wounds. He named a farm nine kilometers away where the wounded were in such bad condition that there would be no difficulty about getting them.

Under the tent, thirty-odd martyrs lay in agony in the straw upon the ground. The heart was sickened by a nameless odor, fetid, sweetish, to which was added the black musk of gangrene. Some lay with yellow, swollen faces covered with flies. Others had the pallor, the leanness, the gestures of El Greco's monks. They all looked as if they had come through fire damp. Their tattered uniforms were clotted with blood, and presented neither cut nor color to indicate which of these were Germans and which ours. They were blended in one vast stupor.

When she stepped into this place, Madame de Bormes was afraid she was going to faint. She made a superhuman effort to recover her balance. Was she not the great-granddaughter of a man who, rather than surrender, had ground a glass and swallowed it?

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Madame Valiche was a veritable surprise. She was back in her element. This morgue transfigured her. She joked in the vocabulary of the barracks, prepared the bandages and hypodermics, cut the hoods, rolled, injected, gave or refused water.

“Hey! my little one,” she cried to the princess, who was as awkward as Madame Valiche might have been at a ball; “hey! get to work! Pass me the scissors. No, no. Don’t unbutton. Cut! Cut! The princess is paying for this. Not you; the other princess, *la République Française*.”

She laughed, on her knees beside a wreck.

The disgust of Madame de Bormes almost made her regret her enterprise. But she saw that the words of Madame Valiche had struck the right note, that the young doctors treated her as one of themselves, and that it was she, the princess, who was the dud.

Turning her eyes, she looked for Guillaume. Guillaume’s mind was not on Christian charity.

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Fortified by his name, he was at the commissary, requisitioning revolvers.

They left that evening for the farm. It was cold and raining. The farm was in the open country. Its yard, humped in the middle, sent muddy water into the stables. The stables sheltered a captured German ambulance section, holding only enemy wounded.

The colloquy took place in the rain by the light of a lantern swinging in the hand of the half-waked doctor in command. He wanted nothing better, he said, than to see this vermin leave.

The German doctor held a pitchfork and a lantern. The wounded men were indistinguishable in the shadow. He prodded with his fork. This was his way of sifting them. Those most quick cried out the loudest. He passed their charts to the dentist. Then the poor fellows were hauled out of the mire and carried into the farmyard.

The face of one of them who was lying on a

stretcher was lighted by one of the headlights. He was young. He was alive, his two hands torn away. He caught up, with his tongue, a little chain hung around his neck, and put the amulets into his mouth. Doubtless, he was asking for a miracle; to waken in his bed, in Germany, and have his hands again. The doctor took the amulets out of his mouth by catching the chain on one of the prongs of the fork. The cripple made no protest, and recommenced.

When they got this poor thing on his feet, he had a horrible reflex. Wishing to grasp the copper rods of the ambulance, he raised his stumps. The nurse hoisted him in. He had fainted.

"Ouf!" said our doctor to the Prussian doctor. "Are you satisfied? Vas you zatisfite?" he pronounced so that the other might understand. But the prisoner bit his lips and gave his instructions by signs.

"It's a nuisance," said Madame Valiche, pushing her hair up under her cap with dis-

gusting hands. "Heaps for the Val-de-Grâce; nix for the rue Jacob. The game is postponed."

The princess almost admired this woman.

"But, Madame," she said to her with a simplicity which people of fashion take to be nastiness, "when there is no war what do you do?"

"Me? I ride horseback in the Bois in the morning. White harness, violets behind the ears. Ritz from five to seven. I recite. I take lessons with Romuald. I recite at the Saturday meetings of the Honorary Aviators' Club at the Petit Palais. Don't go thinking that I always wear a hospital apron. I have my style. I love charmeuse gowns, anklets, bouquets of slightly faded violets, felt hats with Rembrandt plumes. Do you know *The Kettle-Drummer's Betrothed?*"

Madame de Bormes, like a diver, sank down to the bottom of the sea. Madam Valiche opened labyrinths to her.

"Ollé! Ollé!" the woman finished. "I'm going back to the Boches."

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She pirouetted on her heels and sketched a Spanish dance step.

"I met Gentil at the Tooth-pick Ball, doncher know," she said from the stable door, assuming the Belgian accent. "He wore a Boer costume, and I went as Carmen. *A black eye is watching you.*"

She disappeared.

The Princess de Bormes could not imagine Madame Valiche except on the road at night, her hands in the pockets of her man's costume, or, in the daytime, cleaning bedrooms. She thought she had traveled much, known people in mass, but she did not realize that she carried her atmosphere about with her like the earth, and that like the earth she could scarcely believe other worlds to be inhabited.

This personality on the one hand, so much horror on the other, was a stiff trial. For, however great the spirit, the eccentricity, the assurance, of a lady, even one condemned by society, her evolutions still take place on an amateur stage, and the first contact with a

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real theater paralyzes the ease of her movements.

The princess was to collect herself quickly. She was not the woman to endure a check. She could not stand in the middle of this farm as a reproach. The thing to do was to laugh at Madame Valiche and get to work. In a moment, her decision was taken. She broke her ties. And, when Madame Valiche came out of the stable crying, "I have a legless beauty!" the princess said to her in a clear voice: "Do you want me to help you carry him?"

Back in the automobile, Guillaume emptied his pockets of German gun cylinders and shoulder straps. He showed this sinister collection to Madame de Bormes.

Disappointed at first like any beginner by the stench of the wings, she grew accustomed, little by little, to the odor.

She was sleepy. Guillaume was not. He fixed the cushions for her and fell asleep before she did.

Head hanging, his tongue emerged between

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his half-open lips. His hand fell heavily from the arm rest by the window. He looked like the wounded.

Madame de Bormes fell asleep in her turn.

“Ten minutes here for lunch! Everybody out!”

Madame Valiche opened the door.

“Where are we?” asked Clémence, coming half out of sleep.

Guillaume jumped from his dream into the road.

“We are coming into M——, beautiful princess, and our wounded are screaming with joy.”

And in fact, there arose in the cold night a foreign, plaintive sound, imprecations, knocks against the partitions.

“They are suffering,” said Clémence. “The road is full of holes.”

“That didn’t prevent you from sleeping. And it is for their good. We are taking them sleepy-by. They don’t know their luck. But

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that isn't what's up. We're stuck. Five machines are out of gas."

It was true. There was not a moment to lose. The princess's car and that of Madame Valiche would have to go after gasoline. But they were informed that only the bishop could authorize the requisition. It was six o'clock in the morning. The moans of the wounded men decided Madame de Bormes. They thought it would be a clever idea to take along the seminary priest who had found no trace of his brother. He was shoved into the car where Gentil was dozing, and they stopped before the bishop's stoop. The princess rang. An old woman opened the door, followed by a young priest. Madame de Bormes explained their difficulty to him. The young priest, who was buttoning his cassock, took pity on them and told the old woman to get out some bread and jam while he informed His Grace.

His Grace, always in the breach, had recognized the strays of the cavalcade from behind his curtains. He dressed, came down the stairs

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four at a time, and without listening to a word, thundered at Clémence. He was pale with anger. His outburst was concerned with their passage the day before. He *alone* authorized the passage of convoys. He had *absolute* control over the work of the Sanitary Service. He cared no more about their charts than about his first short pants, and he would not give them a drop of gasoline.

“Ah!” cried this good man, good but blinded by Richelieu, and who, on every occasion, *saw red*—“ah! you will pass over my body. Well, so be it. Help yourselves.”

“Come!” he said curtly to the young priest. Then, leaving the princess, he crossed the vestibule and opened the street door.

Alas, an apotheosis awaited him.

On the way back, Madame Valiche and Gentil had emptied the boxes. The automobile was piled high with the disorder and the dirtiness of a dining car. They were drunk on Cordial-Medoc. Their fondness was no longer disguised. The bishop, from his stoop,

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saw this wallowing couple, the bottles, the seminary priest. He jumped. Madame Valiche opened a madwoman's eye.

"Quick, sweetheart, quick," she cried. "Kiss me! Here are the padres."

Madame de Bormes, on her way out, saw only the bishop's back. He was moving in the direction of the cathedral under a fine rain. He held up his skirts, as on the day before, with both hands.

Neither Madame Valiche nor Gentil was in a state to understand how infamous was their conduct.

Hanging on her lover's neck, Madame Valiche sang *Manon*. The seminary priest sobbed. There was something irreparable in this rainy spectacle.

Guillaume saved the situation. He had gone to the mayor and had named Fontenoy. The mayor, enchanted to have his power recognized and the bishop ignored, had given gallons upon gallons.

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The orgiastic couple were removed. They were asleep. The tanks were filled, and the moaning procession started again.

Often, in the days that followed, Madame de Bormes heard these moans on the dark roads and was filled with scruples. She wondered if, for the pleasure of wearing herself out, she was not killing dying men. The roads between the lines and the capital grew longer and were roughened by tractors. Each jolt was a hell in itself to the men. Was it not better to leave them where they were, despite the absence of care? They would die in peace.

But when, having filled the ambulance hospital in the rue Jacob, she visited the men at the Buffon Hospital, at the Val-de-Grâce, at the Peupliers, she realized that her pleasure was not criminal.

This admirable woman, who was by her own efforts to point out to the military and civilian chiefs the way to organization, which they were

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to take only after a long time, sought excuses for herself.

Her daughter well again, Madame de Bormes reopened her apartment in the avenue Montaigne. She wore a path between the avenue and the hospital, sometimes leaving her home to meet the convoy directly at the gates of Paris.

Guillaume was the spoiled child of the house. He had a room there, which allowed him to stay away from his aunt in Montmartre after the more arduous trips. Besides, his aunt was far from his mind. Guillaume turned up to see her ten minutes each week, telling her that he was on liaison service.

He used to say: "I have a liaison, my liaison," the way old rounders formerly spoke. He filled his room with helmet tips and bits of shells.

It was at Reims that Clémence de Bormes and Guillaume received their baptism of fire.

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Arriving over the hills, they saw the town below like the pyre of Jeanne d'Arc. Its somber smoke spread out flat, as far away as the smoke of ships at sea.

Grass grew in the town; trees emerged from windows. The houses, split open, displayed the flowered wall paper of their rooms. One of them still contained a chest of drawers and a frame on the wall. A bed hung over the edge of another.

The cathedral was a mountain of old lace.

The army doctors, incapacitated for action by the intensity of the bombardment, waited for the calm in the cellars of the *Lion d'Or*. Three hundred wounded filled the hospital and the poorhouse. Reims, being in the event of war under the protection of a city which never thought of it, could neither evacuate nor feed anybody. The wounded died of their wounds, of hunger, of thirst, of tetanus, and of gunshots. On the day before, at the hospital, an artilleryman had been told that the only chance to save his life was by the amputation of his leg

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without chloroform. Pallid, he lighted a last cigarette before the torture, when a shell reduced the surgical apparatus to powder and killed two surgical aides. Nobody dared face the artilleryman again. The gangrene was left to invade his leg as ivy invades a statue.

These scenes were repeated ten times a day. The nuns had one cup of sour milk and one half of a sausage for one hundred fifty wounded. In a long, shell-wrecked hall, a priest administered the last sacrament from one straw-mattress to another, and to put the host into the mouths, he had to unclamp the teeth with the blade of a knife.

The services that the convoy could perform were few, but the doctors loaded Gentil down with charts calling for help. They lived as in a tunnel under our projectiles, which passed with the roar of an express train, and under the German shells which punctuated the end of their silken flourish with a black blot of thunder and of death.

The distraction of this town was at its

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height; its nerves were at their end. Everybody was suspected of spying, and execution was swift. The princess, Madame Valiche, and Guillaume met a squad which was definitely marching the Russian painter to a wall. He had been found drawing the cathedral. The magical name saved him, and saved from the same danger other members of the convoy.

This unbearable atmosphere quickened Clémence and Guillaume. They seconded Madame Valiche whose zeal no longer knew any limits and who amazed the two ambulance services.

She proposed to fill the cars with wounded. They were to leave her at Reims with the doctor, and return the next day to take a new load. The princess and Guillaume wanted to stay, too.

"My empty car will hold two men," said Clémence. "It is impossible for me to take their places."

They slept under blankets in the cellar of

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the *Lion d'Or*. The town received the shells like a ship taking the waves of a storm. Each time, they shook it to its soul.

The enemy guns were trained on the gas tank. They turned about it, feeling with the hesitancy of blind men hunting a door knob. This danger put the finishing touch on everybody's nerves.

Guillaume admired the bravery of Clémence de Bormes, who admired his. Now, Guillaume's bravery was childishness, and that of the princess, unconsciousness. They had proof of it. The princess had undergone the worst. She had seen a horse turn the corner of a street stumbling in its entrails. She had seen a group of artillerymen blown up at their gun. She thought herself invulnerable. The only woman in the town, or nearly so, she imagined heaven knows what gallantry to be an attribute of death. She elbowed death without fearing it.

But, while going from the hospital to the poorhouse she saw, fifty yards away, a poor

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woman of Reims and her little girl struck by the fire from the skies. She realized suddenly that shells do not spare women, and she was seized by one of those panics which overcome rich natures. She commenced to cry out, to run in every direction, to call Guillaume.

Guillaume, who had been rummaging in some rubbish, had been shaken and buffeted by the explosion of the shell, and had escaped with no more harm than a blow on the knee from a beam. He came limping. He was green.

Clémence was wringing her hands. She spoke of her daughter, accused herself of being an unworthy mother, begged Guillaume to take her away that very instant.

This was less easy to do than to say. The automobiles were not to be back before evening.

The rest of the day was infernal. Madame Valiche looked after Clémence, who trembled all over.

The cars came back, save one—the idler's.

The others called him the parasite. The Germans had pointed their guns on the convoy, a suspicious looking swarm of ants that ran along the flank of a hill. The shells were trying to take the cars as if the latter had been so many pawns. Finally one of the guns aimed well, checkmated the idler's car, and it vanished.

They had to wait until darkness should hide their departure.

The princess refused to wait. As the Russian painter was turning the crank, a shell, trained on the gas tank, fell into the house behind which the automobile was parked. They were covered with plaster, and the windows flew into bits.

It was thus in a glorious but uncomfortable machine that Clémence and Guillaume left Reims with no fear of the zigzagging of the Russian.

The brisk air whipped their faces and reanimated the princess.

Then Guillaume heard this incorrigible

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woman murmur: "Let us go back, let us go back. It is ridiculous to be afraid."

There are people who have everything and cannot make any one believe it; rich so poor, and noble so vulgar, that the incredulity which they arouse finally renders them timid and gives them a suspicious appearance. On certain women, the most beautiful pearls become false. Contrariwise, on others, the false pearls appear genuine. In the same way, some men inspire a blind confidence and enjoy privileges to which they are in no wise entitled. Guillaume Thomas was of this blessed race.

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People believed him. He had no precautions to take, no calculations to make. A lying star guided him straight to his goal. Therefore, he never wore the preoccupied, tracked look of a crook. Unable either to skate or to swim, he could say: "I skate and I swim." Everybody had seen him on the ice and in the water.

A particular fairy brings this gift at birth. Some people succeed to whose cradle no fairy has come but this one.

Guillaume never questioned himself, never thought: "How shall I get out of it?" or, "I am cheating"; or, "I am a scoundrel"; or, "I am a clever fellow." He went ahead, closely tied into his fable.

The more he lived his part, the more he transmuted it into flesh, bringing to it fire and persuasive sincerity.

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For some time, he had possessed a new toy—the story of the death of his cousins under the eyes of their father. His absurd tale was as naïvely drawn and colored as an Epinal print.

Like these prints, his synthesis was striking, and seemed more real than reality. He touched in his hearers that childishness which remains in us all. At times, he heightened the picture with a little gold. He was taken in by it himself. His eyes filled with tears. Impossible to hear him without being moved.

Never observing that prudence which is the defeat of knaves, he recounted this heroic episode at Madame de Bormes's table before men broken in to the game. He fooled civilians and army men, so true is it that, even when false, truth comes out of the mouths of babes.

Paris filled up again. One by one, those who had deserted it on the run returned. Everybody explained his departure to the rare people who had not fled. Some gave as pre-

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text their work, or their little daughter, or their old mother; others, their important person which would have been seized by the Germans in hostage; still others, service to the country.

Pesquel-Duport, director of *le Jour*, whom his intimate friends called *The Director*, one of the ten people in the circle of Madame de Bormes, tried to prove to her that she had been wrong, although circumstances showed her to have been right; that destiny had, for once, been as mad and as kind as herself, and that much as Kluck might not have entered Paris, he had entered it just the same in theory.

In theory. It was precisely because Clémence had no theories that she was extra-lucid, and it was for the same reason that the architecture of the French victory escaped common sense.

Ordinarily, frequenters of a house hate to see a new face appear. But Guillaume was an exception to the rule.

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"I knew your father very well at the Chamber of Deputies," said Pesquel-Duport to him.

Spoiled child he was, spoiled child he remained. Spoiled by a greater number.

He had told Clémence that his knee had been hurt by the shell-burst which had shattered General d'Ancourt's thigh. This striking shell became a striking act. His heroism won him a man's place, and his Epinal print opened all hearts.

For, not by ruse but by vanity, he had never betrayed the surprise caused by his first trips to the lines.

And after all, Reims was the princess's story. He left it to her. Truth gave him the uneasiness of lying. Reims did not interest him; rather did it disturb him.

Guillaume's best audience was Henriette, the daughter of Madame de Bormes. Have we not already said that she was a born spectator? Until this time, one character alone,

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her mother, had burned the boards. Now, she looked at two.

Reared without the slightest superstition of caste, title, or wealth, Henriette had always seen her mother judge men according to their merit and put artists in the same rank as sovereigns. But she was very young, went out seldom, and rarely had the occasion to meet exceptional men.

Thanks to the war, which was as favorable to meetings as a railway accident, she saw one of these men, but he was of her own age, and they lived side by side.

No need to relate the effect upon this naïve soul of the tales which softened her elders.

She loved Guillaume. She confused him with her mother in her thoughts, and as her mother treated him like a son, she saw nothing culpable in this confusion.

We have said that the princess saw through walls; she read nothing upon them. She was blind to that marvelous mechanism, the opening of a rose. Guillaume the same. But youth

has its contagious diseases. Guillaume the artificial was without artifice. His heart, intact, knew depths of comprehension to which his childish mind could not descend.

Guillaume had been learning life gluttonously since the day when he stepped into the hospital courtyard. He dated from that court. Without congratulating himself in the slightest on his luck, he enriched himself, developed, profited more by each day.

Every man carries on his left shoulder a monkey, and on his right a parrot. Though Guillaume made no effort, his parrot repeated the speech of a privileged class, his monkey imitated its gestures. Thus he was not running the risk of those eccentrics who are taken up one week and dropped the next. He hollowed out a place for himself and, with the credit of his name, seemed to have grown up in it from the beginning.

Only one of Madame de Bormes' intimates looked upon Guillaume with disfavor. It was the director.

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For five years, he had been madly in love with the Princess de Bormes. The genius of this journalist was one long patience. He had wanted *le Jour*; he had it. He had wanted to become rich; he was. He wanted to marry this still youthful widow whose dazzling light, extinguished by the circle in which she moved, would aid him in his work and scintillate in the intellectual world.

Pesquel-Duport believed in the intellectual world. He was of the time of the salons. He wished to have one. He did not know that the official prize-lists carried the names only of the comedians and the marionettes of art, that its workers remained in the shade. He dreamed of a table loaded down with flowers and crystal, the most elegant women and the most illustrious men about it, and Clémence, in the middle, facing him.

The princess replied to his supplications: "Wait, my dear director. Let us wait. I should lie if I said my affection for you was love. Indeed, for you or for any one else.

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But of all the men about me, you are certainly the one who displeases me the least."

She was sincere. She did not find this face ugly. Pesquel-Duport was fifty-three years old, and his hair was entirely white.

He thought himself of unrivaled strength. He was so in the domain of action, but he was naïvely lacking in fine depth of mind, so rare in high places because for this type of mind any choice is impossible.

The man who is truly profound digs in; he does not rise. Long after he is dead, his shaft is found sunken deep in a single block, or bit by bit, in pieces. Meanwhile, the great mediocre intelligences, composed of penetration and of irony, rise without encumbrance to the highest little cornice of power.

It was the simplicity of this ambitious man that Clémence appreciated. For, if she was not very profound, she possessed at least, in common with certain insects, antennæ which she sent forth without method but deeply, into the heart of things.

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Thus, this mad woman carried within herself the verdicts of Tiresias.

Pesquel-Duport was aware of this faculty without understanding it, and he followed her counsel with gratitude and confidence. But he was right in what his penetration allowed him to see: that very intelligent women habitually possess a masculine intelligence which disorients them and perturbs their individuality, while the princess remained the type of womanhood, and owed her resources only to her own sex.

He saw her naked and primitive, an Eve eating the apple that pleased her, and leaving with contentment a Paradise which resembled a house in order.

Pesquel-Duport knew that the morals of the princess were irreproachable. This certainty did not prevent him from being jealous.

The commerce between Cherubin and the Countess, Jean-Jacques and Madame de Warens, Fabrice and la Sanseverina, spoiled

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for him the relations of Clémence and Guillaume. He thought Guillaume in love with his protectress, and his protectress flattered thereby.

There, his penetration deceived him. Guillaume, awakened by Madame de Bormes, drawn by her out of childhood, credited these treasures to Henriette. The princess bewildered him a little. He refound her in Henriette, but on a footing with himself.

From time to time this exquisite actor came down into the darkness of the theater to sit beside Henriette and applaud her mother. Thus Henriette was like those wives who, after the theater, receive from their husbands the marks of affection intended for the star dancer.

Guillaume beautified this little girl with the seductions of her mother, and as she was seductive, he had no effort to make.

The Princess de Bormes reopened and re-decorated her apartment which had been allowed to run down because of the war. She

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did not measure out her pleasures. That of mistress of her home interfered with those of heroism. She no longer followed the convoy regularly, being satisfied to loan her automobile. She painted, rubbed, varnished, and bought. Guillaume dined almost daily in the avenue Montaigne when he was not on the road.

These trips became much less simple. The services were being organized; and nothing seems more suspicious in France than not to be on record somewhere. At the Third Bureau of the War Office, officers who escaped after frightful perils were very badly received. *They were no longer on the records.*

This phantom convoy was a source of irritation, but it experimented gratuitously. It was therefore not abolished; its wheels were encumbered with spokes.

Guillaume continued to remove the spokes. The hospital clung to him as to a life-buoy. The progress of General d'Ancourt's slow agony was closely followed. Everybody

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feared an end which would undoubtedly send his pseudo-secretary back to the troops.

One evening at six o'clock, they were waiting for Guillaume, to whom the War Office now confided the password.

Guillaume had drunk one punch after another with the cyclists of the Invalides. He was drunk. He sung out at the top of his voice that word which France hid in her bodice, ready to die rather than permit it to be taken from her.

An old volunteer interne, the Count d'Oronge, was outraged. He seized Guillaume by the collar and shook him. Guillaume struggled, and called the old fellow an idiot. The courtyard formed a circle around them, and nobody dared say that the general's nephew was in the wrong.

Finally, after the Count d'Oronge, pale with rage, had sent Guillaume rolling on the ground, Guillaume got up, threatened Verne, said that they would hear more of this, and left.

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They tried to calm the count, who repeated like an automaton: "Little beast! Little beast!" and as, during the row, nobody had remembered the fatal word, the convoy was unable to leave.

After eight o'clock, the doctor telephoned to the princess. She was expecting Guillaume for dinner; he was not there.

This telephone call drove the princess and Henriette frantic. They had thought Guillaume at the hospital, and they saw him under the wheels of an autobus. At nine o'clock they telephoned to Verne. He said not a word about the scene, and told them that Guillaume had come and gone.

Pesquel-Duport, who was dining there, teased them gently; then, alone with Clémence, he reproached her for putting herself out over a schoolboy. Who was he exactly? Where was he from? What was his origin?

"What!" she exclaimed. "I suppose you know the name he bears."

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The director continued. "What proof have you that he bears it?"

Disconcerted, Madame de Bormes realized for the first time that she possessed no precise information about Guillaume whatever. But, aside from the fact that he had substituted success for credentials, she did not wish to appear at fault.

"I know what I need to know about him," she said. And she added, transforming on the instant a nervous thought which she presented as justification:

"Do you think I would leave anybody at all with Henriette?"

While this dialogue was going on in the avenue Montaigne, Guillaume, tipsy as a schoolboy, was performing one of the most incomprehensible actions of his career.

The alcohol having raised a fragile lid from reality, he ran to complain to his aunt.

The poor, pious woman understood not a word he said. She finally got the impression

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that he had been tortured, that his stripe had been insulted in a civilian hospital, and that Guillaume was begging her to order those people to respect it.

She mistook his drunkard's tears for tears of shame, and confused the school of fire, the liaison service, and the hospital. In a word, faced by such despair, she promised to go to the rue Jacob and speak to Verne. Guillaume locked himself in his room and, without undressing, slept like an animal.

He was still asleep the next morning when his aunt went down to the rue Jacob.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, when she was seated in the doctor's office, Verne understood the real catastrophe: Guillaume Thomas was plain Thomas and was sixteen years old.

His cross spun before his eyes like a lighted pin wheel.

Listening to the doctor speak of her family, of the Fontenoy, of General de Fontenoy, of the nephew of General de Fontenoy, the poor

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old maid cried out: "But there must be some mistake. An absolute mistake. Guillaume was born at Fontenoy, but that is all. That is not his name. How could he? Oh! Oh!" and she went to pieces.

Verne calculated rapidly. He gathered his strength. It was important that Guillaume remain what he was, or rather, what he was not.

Verne took the old maid's hands, and poured forth a torrential fluid. He was very near exclaiming, in parody of the phrase of the hypnotists:

"You are Fontenoy; I wish it."

She regained her senses.

"Be calm, be calm," said Verne to her. "Drink a little water. There, there. Do not scold Guillaume. He bears too beautiful a name to be scolded."

And as the old maid started to protest:

"Tut-tut," said the doctor. "Not a word. I know; I know. You are too modest."

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The enormity of this word finished the pious woman. The doctor fixed her with a terrible stare and moved her toward the door.

“And above all,” he said almost in her ear, “not a word of our conversation to your nephew. Things of tremendous importance depend on it. Swear it. Swear it on your prayer book!” he cried, seizing the book which emerged from her reticule.

The unhappy woman swore. She thought he was crazy. She was not far wrong. The doctor was crazy with worry.

He accompanied her to the archway for fear that she might meet some one. He did well. They crossed the princess who was on her way in.

Verne looked at the old maid as she turned a corner of the street. Madame de Bormes was waiting for him in the courtyard.

“Lord!” he exclaimed; “what a fool I am. Don’t you know that good woman?”

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And as the princess looked at him vaguely:
“It is Guillaume’s aunt, Mademoiselle de Fontenoy.”

Nothing any one might have said could have been more precious to Madame de Bormes. She congratulated herself upon her replies to the director’s insinuations.

“Journalists,” she thought, “feed on crime and scandal.”

Thomas awoke at his aunt’s with a headache and without the slightest memory of the previous evening’s folly. He remembered only the punch, and that weariness had prevented him from undressing. He washed up, went down the Butte and to the hospital.

The princess was seated in Verne’s office. He was just telling her of the scene about the password, rounding off the corners. “Guillaume is a little quick-tempered; Monsieur d’Oronge is a little deaf. Guillaume sent his aunt on the pretext that he wanted to fight a duel with me.”

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He laughed. He tried to put the good nature of a grandfather on his shark-face.

"Guillaume! There is Guillaume."

Madame de Bormes cried out. They could see him among the cars through the glass door.

"Let him come in," cried the doctor, opening the door. "Let him come in, our prodigal son."

Hatred and respect were mingled in the doctor's soul. He hated Guillaume for having tricked him, but he respected his dexterity. The doctor would have to take his chances with Guillaume. He had the cheat and would be able to utilize him without running any risk. He would be covered by the princess.

This man whom titles intoxicated thought it would be bad form to quibble with the princess about a title, and that her social influence would be great enough to turn a pullet into a carp or a Thomas into a Fontenoy if ever she were compromised. Incapable of deciphering the hieroglyph represented by such a woman,

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he accused her of the worst, and did not hesitate to consider her the mistress of the young swindler.

The princess scolded Guillaume for failing to appear at dinner on the previous evening. He told her of the punch.

At the name of Monsieur d'Oronge, everything leaped back, feet together, into his memory.

"It is your fault," said Verne, "that the convoy is held up and the wounded are waiting. The cars were to have left at midnight. They are still in the court. By the way," he added lightly, "I received a call from your aunt. An extremely religious person, as the general is."

He watched Guillaume closely. Guillaume found this remark very simple.

"The devil," thought Verne; "the rascal! He is good. He will go far. He will go far if he is not stopped on the way. Let us see to it that he is stopped only when it is too late."

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"Why do I not know your aunt?" asked Clémence.

"She is a saint," Guillaume replied. "She never stirs from home except to go to Sacré-Cœur. Probably she came this morning because she was on her way down to Saint François-Xavier's where she is burning candles."

The doctor, nodding his head, applauded inwardly as a criminal in a courtroom applauds an accomplice who never contradicts himself. His side was chosen. He would no longer be robbed. He would go halves with Guillaume.

But, as there are people whom one believes and others whom one doubts, so there are those who win and those who lose. The doctor lost.

For Guillaume, the convoy, the hospital, Verne, Madame Valiche, the dentist, the X-ray man's wife, constituted an empty box. There remained its contents: the princess and Henriette.

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Say, rather, Henriette and the princess. For some time past, Guillaume had been bored; the first symptoms of love which, before appearing in its splendor, begins prudently by disfiguring, deflating, discoloring everything. Guillaume grew thin; torn asunder by the growth of his body, he dragged his rôle, his verity, the discomfort of a normal blossoming, under strata of lies.

The habit of never analyzing himself, and his active daydreaming did not help him to see clearly. By dint of living in the dusk, he became overpowered by darkness. Instead of saying to himself that he was in love with Henriette, which was not part of his game, he hypnotized himself about the game and attributed his restlessness to inaction, to the absence of adventure.

General d'Ancourt died. Guillaume seized this pretext to disappear from the hospital. Verne nearly burst with rage. But what could he do?

Without a word to Henriette and her

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mother, Guillaume went to see Pesquel-Duport at the newspaper office. He invented a story to the effect that the death of General d'Ancourt had released him from service; that he had been invalided because of his knee and his nervous condition; that it was thanks to his uncle he had been able to remain with the general; and that he had been rejected by the military authorities out of deference to General de Fontenoy who was already overwhelmed by deaths in the family. He was bored behind the lines, and he begged the director to send him to one of the welfare huts maintained by the newspaper at the front. But not a word was to be said about this visit in the avenue Montaigne. He would pretend to have been ordered away.

Pesquel-Duport almost fell on his neck. Nothing suited his plans better than to get Guillaume out of the way. He hid his satisfaction, rebuked Guillaume while he felicitated him on his courage, and promised, on the condition of absolute silence at Madame de

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Bormes's, to enroll him for service at the welfare hut at Coxyde, on the Belgian front.

The Belgian front meant Belgians, Zouaves, Africans, British troops, and marines. A wonderful opportunity. Guillaume was radiant.

His exuberance was brief. Once more, he felt sad without knowing why. He dared not raise his tearful eyes to Henriette and her mother. Madame de Bormes thought he was deeply affected by the death of his chief. Love made of Henriette a Stradivarius, a barometer sensitive to the slightest change of emotional temperature. She alone deciphered as in an open book that which her mother thought regret, and Guillaume, boredom mingled with remorse.

This remorse was not caused by an indelicacy which was no longer one in his eyes, but by the fact that he had begged the director, without their knowledge, to send him away from them. At least, this convenient motive served to explain his condition to himself.

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It was, therefore, with hanging head that he told Madame de Bormes and her daughter of his transfer. The blow was softened by the advantage of the post (an invalid's assignment, Guillaume explained), and by the coincidence which attached him to a service whose strings were in Pesquel-Duport's hands.

But the princess knew by affinity that a post of security would not remain so for Guillaume.

"I do hope," she moaned, "that you won't play the fool. I shall ask the director to give orders to have you watched."

The brief week of departure never ended. Guillaume, who thought he was bored, and that he was leaving on the wings of a chimera, was creating between the women and himself that tie of absence which is enforced in proportion as it lengthens and reverses the perspective; since in the mind's eye, we always see those who leave growing disproportionately.

Henriette no longer slept at night. She said

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to herself: "He loves me. He thinks that I do not love him; or else, he is afraid of mamma. He is running away, and is suffering." She spelled out without help the primer of love. It wanted nothing less than the worry of the princess, her ladders and her pots of lacquer, to hide from her the red eyes of her daughter.

After Guillaume's departure, a tragi-comedy because of the tears and the gifts, Henriette fell ill.

"Henriette is like me," said Clémence to Pesquel-Duport. "Until now, she had her father's unbearable equilibrium. But for some time, I have found her emotional, like myself. This metamorphosis draws us together. Guillaume's departure has made her ill. I am glad of it."

The young girl's love was the most patent thing in the world. As soon as Pesquel-Duport perceived it, he added this ballast to that thrown out by Guillaume's departure.

Alas, Clémence, the blind seeress, did not

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see that as in a *lied* by Heinrich Heine, her daughter was in love with a phantom.

The hut of *le Jour* was camped on the road between Nieuport-ville and Coxyde-ville. It fed and revived the relief detachments. It was composed of a gypsy caravan smoking like an alchemist's crucible at which nine volunteers in relays poured liters of black coffee and punch by the side of the road. These volunteers, who had the rank of second lieutenant, and were commanded by a real second lieutenant, were housed at Coxyde-ville in an evil-looking hovel. All these hovels had an air of

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crime; most of all those of Coxyde-bains. They were the half-destroyed summerhouses of Belgian bathers, up and down the North Sea.

Nieuport-ville, Nieuport-bains, Coxyde-bains, and Coxyde-ville bound a warped frame of roads within sight of one another.

Between Coxyde-bains and Nieuport-ville lay the dunes. Between Coxyde-ville and Nieuport-ville were fields, farms, and a wood called the Triangular Wood. The whole was empty, and peopled in secret.

The scattered French and British artillery profited by the dunes and the trees. Zouaves and Africans occupied the trenches at the mouth of the Yser where one of their sentry posts guarded the first sack of the snaky, hollow town that wound from Belgium to the Vosges. Farther on, toward Saint-Georges, the marines watched over dearly conquered ground, taken during the Battle of the Yser.

Zouaves and marines foregathered during

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periods of repose in the former hotels and properties of Coxyde-bains.

The two Nieuports, in ruins, offered nothing but the shelter of their cellars to the chiefs and first-aid stations of the different corps. These towns and this countryside, uninhabited by a living soul, hid an incredible labyrinth of corridors, roads, and subterranean galleries. Men moved in them like moles, able to go down into one hole in Coxyde and come up out of another in the front lines without seeing the sky. Sector 131 was a quiet one. A tacit agreement forbade us to fire on Ostend in exchange for which the enemy did not aim at La Panne, the place of exile of the king and queen. The sovereigns lived there with the royal children, who were enchanted by the unexpected and by a charming poultry yard.

The river and the floods served as natural defenses to protect Nieuport against a great surprise. Colonel Jocaste believed no less in a night attack by rafts on the strand. It was a chimerical fear. He cherished it. For this

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reason, there had been built along the coast between Nieuport and the Yser, a pine communicating trench which smelled like a Swiss hotel and bore the colonel's name. This man considered, quite rightly, that his trench was one of the marvels of the world. As a matter of fact, it was as useless as the pyramids, it hung like the gardens of Babylon, it was as hollow as the Colossus of Rhodes, as funereal as the tomb of Mausolos, as costly as the statue of Jupiter, as cold as the Temple of Diana, and as far-seeing as the lighthouse of Alexandria. Lookouts stood at intervals and shot at the sea-gulls.

Underneath, Nieuport was like the recesses of the Châtelet theater. The cellars had been joined together and this sewer was called The Subway. Not the least of its charms was to find oneself ejected at a sign which read *Place de la Concorde* among the ruins of a casino.

An extension gave access to a cellar which was the colonel's Post of Command. This was the cellar of a villa named *Pas sans peine*

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where, by a miracle, the dining room alone stood entire. On quiet days, the colonel lunched there like a fat rat in a piece of gruyère cheese.

The masterpiece of the sector was the dunes.

There was something very moving about this feminine landscape, sleek, curved, haunched, couched, filled with men. For, only in appearance were the dunes deserted. In reality, it was all trickery, stage setting, deception, traps, and artifice. Colonel Quinton's false dune was a true woman's lie. This brave colonel had built it under a hail of shells which he had received seated in a rocking-chair, smoking. It concealed, high up, an observation post from which the observer could toboggan down in the wink of an eye.

In a word, there were here two surfaces: an inexhaustible series of complications on the "tails" side, which presented on the "heads" side, to the German telescopes, an immense tower of cards, a silent card-sharp.

"Where is the big gun? Where is it? On

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the right? The left? In the middle? Follow me closely. Where is it? Right? Left? Boom! In the middle." And the gun, under a tarpaulin painted to resemble the camel-humped dunes with their pale grass, backed up and sent forth a shell of the weight of a safe.

Nothing was visible. You could hear the one-fifty-fives, the seventy-fives, uncorking dry champagne, sending out shells which sounded like the tearing of silk; the British gun whose location was never guessed; the anti-air guns that crowned the planes with little bubbly clouds, like seraphims escorting the Blessed Virgin; the oyster-colored North Sea shaking a water so cold, so gray, so like the formula H_2O , NaCl , that a man would as soon have thought of burning himself, or burying himself alive, as of bathing in it.

The night, the sky, and the earth swung in the light of the rockets as a room and its ceiling, lighted by a candle, swing when the flame moves. When there was a fog, it blotted the lights of the cannonade so that they became a

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single, blinding gleam that was maddening. Out over the sea, the searchlights kissed, parted, and gesticulated. At times they grouped like ballet dancers, and then one saw the white bellies of the Zeppelins on their way to London.

Did they sleep at Coxyde, they were awakened by the coast defense guns. The shooting shook the world and threw giant flowers of mauve light against the windows.

On Sundays, in the sound of machine guns vocalizing in the sky on a single note, the laughter of a gull, and of singing motors which suddenly darkened their pale blue murmur to a velvet black, officers of the Royal Navy played tennis.

This vast lie of sand and leaves wanted only Guillaume de Fontenoy.

He came. It was evening. A side car brought him over from Dunkerque. The welcome at the hut was icy. The reason for this

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was that in order to make room for Guillaume, Pesquel-Duport had been obliged to withdraw the life of the party from active service. Guillaume usurped a place still warm, a warm place so cold that it froze his heart. He had expected to find comrades. He found mortal enemies.

These ridiculous boys, closed against Guillaume's supernatural charm, thought him an accomplice in a crime of whose very existence he was ignorant, and sent him to Coventry. Fearful of rank and on the lookout for reward, the only thing which might have influenced them was the name of the general. But a sector is a provincial town where the pharmacist is held in greater awe than Charcot. Fontenoy did not command this sector.

The petty tongue-waggers saw immediately that Guillaume was enthusiastic. That was the last straw. Each volunteer was as little a volunteer as possible. Nothing noble, or gay, or simple united them. They took Guillaume's zeal as an insult. "He despises us," they thought, and in revenge, they sent him to

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carry reports to the zouaves, in the danger zone. Guillaume asked for nothing better. Across this park of fire and thunder, he walked, ravished.

It was in this way that he made the acquaintance of Colonel Jocaste. This colonel, reading the name of Fontenoy, was bowled completely over. He dragged Guillaume into his hole, and, as it was five o'clock, asked him to tea. The telephone operator played the daughter of the house. He spread over one end of the table some cups, a teapot, and a box of biscuits.

Since it was forbidden to sack the country houses, and as the slightest utensil came from this source, everybody always claimed to have found things in a church.

"These cups came from the church," said the colonel, winking.

The colonel plagued Guillaume with questions about his uncle. This general was his god. While he spoke, he rolled his putties around his fat legs and moaned as if they had

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been surgical dressings. He confided to Guillaume his fears about the rafts and drew for him his plan of defense. He also feared gas, which was almost impossible in this place of turning winds. He was proud of his lacy dining room.

"After all," he said to Guillaume; "I can never give up form if it is possible to retain it. It's in my bones. For example: I don't mind telling you, in confidence, that I have a mistress. She is a lady. Well, when she dines with me, or with her husband and me—always an evening gown, and the men in dinner jackets."

His fourth mania was a seventy-five, set up in the front line, bolt by bolt, like a ship in a bottle, forty yards from the enemy listening post.

"You see their jaws drop," said he, "in case of attack. A seventy-five in the front line!"

He laughed, slapping his thighs.

Suddenly, the door opened and the general commanding the sector appeared.

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With two captains harnessed in straps and ribbons, he was making a tour of inspection, a sort of surprise party very disagreeable to those who received it.

The colonel jumped to his feet and, bowing, overturned the box of biscuits. The general, reacting with instinctive politeness, stooped to pick up the biscuits and bumped his helmet against the head of the colonel, who had bent over from his direction.

"Have I hurt you?" he asked.

He had hurt him confoundedly. The colonel said it was nothing. Guillaume, from a corner of the cellar, devoured this astonishing scene with his eyes.

Now the poor colonel, a little recovered from his mental and physical shock, described his marvels.

He had reached his seventy-five in its hood when the general, forgetting that the dunes were camouflaged, asked if this were a hood of leaves. Just then, an artilleryman appeared. The colonel was motioning to him to

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leave when the general interposed, saying emphatically that he did not wish in any way to disturb the routine of the sector.

“Speak,” said the colonel.

It was about the seventy-five. The man had come to say, after an interminable prologue, that the measurements taken by the engineers were inaccurate, that the hood was too narrow and the gun carriage was visible, and that there was every chance of a “bamboula” from the enemy by way of reprisal.

“Reprisal! Reprisal!” the colonel burst out, furious at appearing ridiculous before the general. “We shall see. I’ll give them a reprisal!”

He shouted into the sounding tube. “Command one hundred rounds of seventy-five on the Vromberg villa!”

“Vromberg?” the general inquired. “By Jove,” he said, turning to his aides, “it is the villa of Madame Vromberg. A charming woman. Poor Madame Vromberg.”

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"Do you know her, general?" cried the colonel, who was losing his wits. Seizing the tube, he ordered; "Cancel the firing; cancel the firing."

The general saw the state into which his call had thrown the poor fellow.

"The devil," said he. "You are gallant with the ruins. I am going on. Everything seems to be doing as well as possible. Stay here. Don't disturb yourself. Don't trouble. I know the way."

The colonel found himself alone with Guillaume. He was sweating. He rubbed the bump raised by the helmet. He asked if he had seemed up to the job.

"Of course, there is the story of the seventy-five," he repeated. "But my communicating trench makes everything all right."

They took tea.

Bureaucrats, more bureaucrats, Guillaume thought. He was hunting a breach. His ob-

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jective was that redoubtable place which he heard crackling at night like fireworks, that brisk, uneven fusillade which resembled the jerks of a sleeper who dreams that he is walking.

Two days later, the colonel gave him a guide to take him over the lines. They left by moonlight at eleven o'clock.

Instead of taking the communicating trench so dear to the colonel, everybody usually disobeyed him and reached the river bank by what was formerly the main street of Nieuport. They walked from barricade to barricade between the dominoes formed by a few standing walls and the moon. The young little ruins were enlarged in the moonlight, and to the right of the sand, two or three chloroformed trees stood asleep.

A bridge of jumbled beams, joists, planks, billets, and barrels crossed the Yser at its mouth. The gray water jostled its way, penetrating tragically to the North Sea like a flock of sheep entering a slaughterhouse.

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At night, this water became phosphorescent. A cartridge thrown into it sank all alight, like the *Titanic*. When a projectile fell, its drop lighted at the bottom of the water a whole boulevard of magnificent shops.

The trenches began on the other bank. Guillaume touched the first of the sacks of sand which protected the hollow town, and into which the bullets buried themselves with the drone of a bee in a flower.

The labyrinth of trenches was unending. Guillaume followed his pipe-smoking, silent guide, who was bundled in mittens, sheepskins, and knitted helmets. They heard the waves, sometimes behind them, sometimes to the right or to the left. They turned without knowing that they were turning, and never knew where to look for the sea. At times, the water rose half way up their legs.

This Venice, this Algiers, this Naples of the dream world, seemed as empty as the dunes, for, in a thousand cellars the Zouaves slept in

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rows like bottles. They were broken on days of orgy.

At two points on this front, the meanderings of the French and German lines brought them almost together. The first, called Mamelon-Vert, was near Saint-Georges; the second, near the strand. On both sides, listening posts had been dug out.

Guillaume slipped into the tunnel. This could only be done flat on the stomach. The tunnel opened into a ditch containing two men. In the daytime, they played cards. The enemy occupied an analogous ditch a dozen yards off. Whenever one of the Zouaves sneezed, a German voice cried "God bless you!"

Along the first-line wall, on a sort of embankment, or cornice, or pedestal, the look-outs stood at intervals. This wall was built of everything, like the rest of the town. Aside from the sacks, it seemed to be composed of mirrored wardrobes, chests of drawers, arm-chairs, piano tops, boredom, sadness, and silence.

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This silence, aggravated by the fusillade and the reflux, was comparable to the silence of crystal balls filled with snowy flakes. One walked here as one flies in a dream.

Guillaume's rubber boot having slipped, he displaced some water. One of the lookouts turned around. It was a Moroccan light-cavalryman. He put his finger to his lips. Then he became a statue again.

This Arab, in his burnous of newspapers and string, held himself more immobile than dead Antar on his horse. Guillaume saw between the sacks flour-sprinkled by the moon, this silhouette of a terrible, jealous miller, watching with a gun at a window of his mill.

These lookouts concentrated all their life in their faces. When they reloaded, their hands came and went like servants. Thus France had, on the edge of her cloak, an amazing ermine of attentive faces.

But what fascinated Guillaume was the electrocuting strip of No-man's-land, the Franco-German strip where the bramble of

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barbed wire grew. No foot trod here between attacks, save on patrol at night. Guillaume would have given anything to accompany one of these patrols.

Instead of that, he made his way back. He was only a tourist. He left the theater and found himself again in the street without having shared the mysterious life of the actors.

His interest died. Each week weighed on his shoulders. His only pleasure was in the letters and gifts which came from Henriette and her mother.

His uneventful days turned his memory toward the two women. Little by little, like presbyopic people who see only at a distance, Guillaume read his feelings for Henriette. She was far away, unreal, fictitious. Therefore, she could enter into his fiction.

He played this act marvelously. He sighed,

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aged, went without eating, cut hearts in aluminum rings, wrote letters which he afterwards tore up—for, with the paw of cats at play who know instinctively how far the claw will go without scratching, Guillaume, tortured by love, did nothing which might reveal the fact to Henriette, give the slightest root to his dream.

He did not try to learn if this love were reciprocated. He could say with Goethe: "I love you; does that concern you?"

While this was going on, an order was received transferring the hut to the Somme. The material was to be left in Belgium with a volunteer guard.

The volunteer selected could only be Guillaume. The wiseacres thought they were playing a great joke in getting rid of him. As a matter of fact, it was he who was getting rid of them.

Two days after they had gone, Guillaume met young Captain Roy of the marines.

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“What!” said Roy. “They have left you alone? Come along to our mess.”

Heroism gathered together a mixed group under the same palm. Many embryonic murderers found in war the opportunity, the excuse, and the reward of their vice, side by side with the martyrs. It was astonishing, for example, that the war took in such criminals as the *Joyeux*, the battalion of Parisian Apaches condemned to military service in Africa. They held the sector between the marines and the Zouaves. Society found it proper that now they should employ those instincts for which it had ostracized them.

But neither Zouaves nor marines profited by the open season. Nothing ferocious spotted the marines.

Their officers were charming heroes. These young men, the bravest in the world and of whom not one remains alive, played at fighting without the least hatred. Alas, such games end badly.

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They served in the lines in relays, and lived in a villa at Coxyde-bains. Everything beautiful in Guillaume enchanted them. And, in fact, with what could one have reproached him at the moment? He deceived nobody. These noble souls were not influenced by the name of a general. Indeed, had not this name lost its practical meaning here and become a simple *nom de guerre*? They all had them. Guillaume Thomas was *Fontenoy* as Roy was *Fantomas*, Pajot *Giraffe*, Combescure *Sudden Death*, Breuil de la Payotte, son of the admiral, *The Admiral*, Le Gannec *Gordon Pym*.

Their duty seemed to be the same as that of Madame de Bormes: to be bored as little as possible. The rest of the sector, like the rest of the world in respect of Clémence, did not understand it. People took their absence of constraint to be arrogance. They called them aristocrats, and were only slightly mistaken. This battalion was an aristocracy, that is to say, a profound democracy, a family.

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Such a welcome as Guillaume received was possible only here. Elsewhere it would have been forbidden by jealousy, fear of reports, rank, or class distinction.

The battalion wore that air of negligence which is the mark of true elegance. At the end of the meal, Le Goff, a sailor who served at table, sewed anchors on the blue welfare tunic, and the trick was played. Guillaume was adopted. They were nevermore to be separated.

The marines, like the princess, constituted a home for Guillaume. They were mad about him, feasted him, consulted him. They took him to dine with their chief. To this delightful old fellow, the adoption seemed as funny as if his children, as he called his subalterns, had brought him a little bear. The fact is that like a bear, a monkey, or a marmot, Guillaume became a mascot. He felt that he had arrived. His wave of love for Henriette fell. His heart had beaten because of her, but his love was merely love. He transferred its impetus to

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his new friends. He poured out his wealth upon them. He was in love with the battalion.

Everything furthered his luck, for, as a real marine, Guillaume would have found his task difficult. Having become a marine without being one, he could enjoy his happiness to the full.

He half-read the long letters from the avenue Montaigne. He forgot them unopened in his pockets. He distributed the sweets to the mess and sent his thanks on cards, which forbid lengthy effusions.

Had he time to write? He followed Roy, or Breuil, or Le Gannec to their post. He went up to the lines with them, and sometimes they bequeathed him to their successor.

He had written only one long letter—to Pesquel-Duport. He begged to be left at Coxyde, the vague material providing an excuse for this endless stay.

His joy was so complete that he tore up his leave. He told the mess that he could not

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make up his mind to go away. This act crowned his conquest. The young officers organized a banquet in his honor and sent for champagne to La Panne, where the Terlinck Hotel and a pastry shop were still doing business, despite the bombs.

They got drunk and made speeches in which the name of Fontenoy was often repeated but in a disrespectful tone. The general was given the rôle of a blockhead rather than of an idol. The real idol was Guillaume Thomas.

Mademoiselle de Bormes and the princess lived in the expectation of Guillaume's leave. They prepared a thousand ways to spoil him, and Henriette's color came back. The disappointment broke them up. Guillaume maintained that he could not leave the hut and its contents. "They would pillory me," he wrote.

They were not fooled, and yet they deceived themselves even more than if they had believed him.

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“He thinks that we would prevent him from going back to his duty,” cried Clémence.

Henriette, in bed and in tears, kissed a snapshot sent by Guillaume, blamed her own silence, and opened her heart wide to the torture of the idea that Guillaume did not love her and fled from her, or that he loved her and was trying to extinguish a flame to the crowning of which he dared not aspire.

She saw only this black and this white. She could distinguish nothing between.

The optimism of her age leaned toward the white.

“He loves me,” she thought, “and his delicacy is keeping him away. He is afraid that mamma would think him a deceiver and drive him away. I alone am guilty. Because of my inaction, he is in danger.”

Henriette promised herself to speak, to beg. But she could not bring herself to do it. Her secret was so dear to her that she put off sharing it with anybody.

Mother and daughter, beside themselves,

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harassed Pesquel-Duport. Everything was his fault. They did not know how truly they spoke.

He did his best to exculpate himself, to explain that orders were orders. The avenue Montaigne became unbearable.

Suddenly he had one of those ideas which, when they appeal to the crowd, make the fortune of journalists.

"The newspaper," he said, "is organizing a series of theatrical performances at the front. I shall send them to the North front next week, enroll you in the company, and go with you."

The princess kissed him. Henriette wept.

The director kept his promise. Four days later, Clémence, Henriette and he took the train that carried the troupe.

It seemed to the women that this was an excursion train taking them out for luncheon in the country. Guillaume knew nothing about it. They intended to surprise him.

The troupe, recruited haphazardly, was composed of a few extras, a songbird in gown and

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hat à la *Grande Mademoiselle*, an illustrious tragedian, a beginner in mourning, with a last year's honorable mention from the *Conservatoire*, and a juvenile lead whose son, a colonel, had just won his seventh palm. He hoped to be able to see him at the front.

Pesquel-Duport was introducing the travelers to one another when the princess, stupefied, saw Madame Valiche come forward after buying oranges on the platform. She wore the same get-up in which she had journeyed to the farm.

"Of all things!" exclaimed this horrible woman. "You! You here! But what has happened, *my dear?*" she added to show to the actors her intimacy with Madame de Bormes.

The princess let her profit by the "*my dear,*" for she was seeing life through rosy glasses, and did not wish to spoil the pleasure of any one. She presented Pesquel-Duport, and explained that it was to him she owed this favor.

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She added:

“Guillaume de Fontenoy is at Coxyde; we hope to see him there.”

“You do, eh?” thought Madame Valiche, winking her eye.

The princess was not anxious to have Madame Valiche, with her memory of their common service, hanging about Guillaume and herself. For a moment, she had thought of concealing her true purpose. But she realized immediately that this woman would revenge herself as soon as she saw that something was being hidden from her. This realization made her pronounce a harmless sentence with a blush.

Pesquel-Duport was clever, but not clever enough. He remarked Clémence’s tone and the wink. They annoyed him.

Now Madame Valiche was explaining:

“You are going to see me, my dear. I wanted to visit the North. My teacher, Romuald (she indicated the tragedian), is taking me with him. But don’t think I’m

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not paying my way. I shall give *The Kettle-Drummer's Betrothed*, if you please, and I appear in *The Drum-Major's Daughter*."

The princess presented Henriette, who thought herself already at the theater. With the carelessness of youth, she laughed at Madame Valiche and the actors, her laughter continuing to shine in her face while she looked at them curiously, as at so many strange animals.

Pesquel-Duport had had the precaution to reserve a compartment for the two women and himself at some distance from the compartment of the troupe.

Each time that Madame Valiche passed in the corridor she threw a glance upon the empty seats and, through the glass, pantomimed a "Ha! You're well taken care of" that was a reproach. For in her compartment they were crowded.

The princess was in a stew. Pesquel-Duport was firm.

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“Don’t ask her in,” said he. “That woman looks like a sheet of fly-paper.”

When he went to say a few words of encouragement to his cattle, he heard old Romuald growing reminiscent about the war of 1870. The story had been commenced as the train pulled out. One month before, this man had had an idea which will stupefy those who do not know the theatrical world.

Having been the first to learn of the heroic death of one of his pupils, he had gone to the home of the parents, a decent couple who idolized their son, and, to soften the blow, as he thought, had informed them of the news by reciting a sonnet of his own composition.

The unfortunate people were at table. Romuald recited from the doorway. They understood not a word and thought him crazy. He had to explain afterwards, as one has to recut the throat of a man mangled by the executioner’s ax.

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The young actress in mourning was the fiancée of the pupil. She knew the sonnet by heart.

At Dunkerque they were met by automobiles. The tragedian wore a Bolivar hat, gaiters, a knapsack, and opera glasses. He was looking for enemy airplanes.

The next morning at La Panne, where the troupe was lodged, Madame de Bormes and her daughter, wild with impatience, almost fainted. Guillaume and Roy, having learned of the arrival of the actresses, had come to meet them.

When he saw who the actresses were, Guillaume thought he was dreaming. This was proof to him that he was not. The two women and himself formed a group proper for an Empire print: *The Return of the Soldier*.

Guillaume's fresh, exalted heart spared them celebration. He had not been able to make the effort to go to them, but he exulted in

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their coming to him and in their acquaintance with his comrades. His was not one of those narrow souls respectful of water-tight compartments.

When a miracle lasts, it ceases to be considered a miracle. This is why apparitions disappear so quickly. At the end of a quarter of an hour, their astonishment was over. Guillaume kissed Madame Valiche, and the marines carried off the director and the two ladies.

They were to meet the troupe again in the evening at Coxyde for the show.

It was raining. This day was, for these three beings, the most beautiful in the world. Pesquel-Duport was rejuvenated, and the marines took to him.

Madame de Bormes and Henriette profited by the preparations made for the actresses and could easily believe that this enchanting welcome was intended for them. Their overflowing joy was made up of dunes, airplanes, cannon, helmets, and, when they entered the villa and crossed the kitchen, of the sight of half-

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naked devils tattooed with anchors and lighted by the fires of hell, who were gesticulating about iron pots.

Madame de Bormes had an extraordinary success. Everybody, liable to be killed the next day, gave himself up without reserve or calculation. The atmosphere of generosity which was hers as it was Guillaume's brought out her true worth.

Moreover, a beautiful woman and a fresh young girl in such a setting were as startling as roses on an iceberg.

Roy led them everywhere. They were acclaimed. Their hands were kissed, their gowns were touched. Each man saw in them a cherished resemblance.

Madame de Bormes, who recognized the ridiculous at a league, felt that she could, without making herself ridiculous, that she *ought to*, distribute the leather fringes of her coat. It is very rare for a woman to find herself in a situation in which she may make such a ges-

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ture. The Queen of the Belgians would not have succeeded better.

Guillaume was proud of her, and looked at Henriette. Henriette, in conditions so rich, so full, no longer doubted the existence of happiness. Therefore, she was not afraid to seem frivolous in Guillaume's eyes, to loose the reins of her amusement.

This sweet slope led them to the show.

It took place in a hangar of the British squadron, better equipped than our elegant theaters.

The motors of the chiefs purred, their lights out. Cards of admission came out of pockets. The soldiers went in one by one, for the room was rather small and the tickets had been counted out with an eye dropper.

The unlucky men took their misfortune good-naturedly. Sitting on the sand, they listened as a comrade recited monologues. A few made holes in the planks with their bayonets to see the actresses undress.

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The orchestra played the national anthems of the Allies in succession, running one into the next so that they caught fire from one another. Then the French, Belgian, and British generals sat down and the show began.

The troupe performed *The Fear of Blows*, one act from *The Spark*, and one act from *The Drum-Major's Daughter*. As there was a captain in the first play, and also in the others, the soldiers thought it was all one play in three acts. They could not follow the plot.

Following the comedies and an operetta in which Madame Valiche appeared disguised as a drummer, she came out alone, and recited, in her immodest costume, *The Kettle-Drummer's Betrothed*. She was a great success.

With the help of grimaces and double meanings, she ended by giving this poem a sense of naughtiness and actuality. The song bird was not so successful. Wishing to make the audience sing with her the refrain of a marching

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song which the army never sang, she cried "Altogether, boys!" into the void.

Romuald saved the situation by declaiming the *Marseillaise* with a French flag draped over his shoulder.

After the performance, the troupe was invited to visit General Madelon. Madame de Bormes and Henriette could not refuse, the more so because Pesquel-Duport was to attend in his official capacity.

Guillaume and his comrades arranged that after the party the three would meet them and would be taken to Saint-Georges, but secretly, the general having forbidden civilians to go up to the lines.

This general misunderstood Pesquel-Duport's title, thought he was the director of a theater, and congratulated him on his troupe.

"You have there," he said, "an excellent troupe."

"But, general," Pesquel-Duport corrected gently, "I am a guest."

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“So am I, good Lord! So am I. And I am not complaining worth a damn. Isn’t that so, ladies?” exclaimed the general.

His words had no sense. He called this kind of exclamation “*impromptu wit*.”

The princess and Henriette were anxious to leave. Pesquel-Duport frowned. Finally, after a decent interval, they went.

“Bravo! Bravo again, ladies,” said the general, who recognized in them the performers of the evening.

The rest of the night was sublime.

Though their slippers caught in the laths of the board-walks, the women walked four hours.

Guillaume had covered them with capes and helmets in a cellar at Nieuport.

On their way back, they shook with weariness.

At one moment, the princess stopped short.

“I don’t know what is the matter with me,” she said. “I am filled with anguish.”

“You are not afraid? Lean on me; there is

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nothing to fear," said Roy. "The enemy are asleep."

"It is so stupid. I am a silly woman. Let us go on."

Madame Valiche knew of or sniffed the visit to the lines. Furious at not having been asked, she had her revenge.

On their return, she found herself alone in the corridor of the train with Henriette. Believing that there existed some commerce between the princess and Guillaume, and having guessed the secret of the young girl, she pretended to look around to be sure she was not overheard, and then whispered:

"I say! Guillaume is mad about you. Go easy. Don't force the little fellow to do something desperate. He is capable of getting himself killed."

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And without waiting for a reply, leaving Henriette speechless, frozen, she returned to the actors' compartment.

At the mess, nothing was spoken of save the two women. More than an uncle who was a general, they added prestige to Guillaume.

"Look here," said Roy, "that kid adores you."

In the same voice that he had assumed to answer the princess in Verne's office—"my aunt is a saint," etc.—Guillaume replied to the marine:

"It's mutual. We love one another like brother and sister."

This visit had brought riches to Guillaume and left them with him. A new accessory ornamented his strange game. Henriette might go to the end of the world without him feeling any loss thereby.

A misfortune fell upon the group of Coxyde.

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Pajot was to go home on leave the day of his return from the lines. He trembled all night in fear of a possible accident. Roy teased him, and as Pajot was begging him to be careful, he lathered his face with the light from a pocket flashlight. Pajot fell dead with a bullet in the brain. It was a stray bullet, but Roy considered himself a murderer. He never came out of his black sorrow.

Guillaume did not leave his side, watched over him, tried to cheer him.

In Paris, Mademoiselle de Bormes lived with the words of Madame Valiche. She was in no state to deplore the meddling of such a woman with her torment. She reproached herself for committing a crime. Even had she not loved Guillaume, her sense of duty would now have ordered her almost to pretend. And she did love him.

She determined very wisely to tell everything to Pesquel-Duport.

She arranged that they go together to fetch

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her mother who was taking tea at the Saint-Cloud Country Club.

Pale, half-dead, she bared her heart to him in the car.

Pesquel-Duport had known that she was in love, but not to this point.

On the day before, he had learned, as the result of an inquiry, that Guillaume, though of good family, usurped the name of Fontenoy. He was thus in an extremely delicate situation. In the face of the treasures spread before him, this kindly man decided to postpone the truth. He said to Henriette that he would speak to her mother, and he begged her to be calm and to fear nothing.

“Act quickly!” cried this virgin in the voice of an old mistress, “we have not a moment to lose. Let us save him!”

She blew her nose, arranged her hair, and adjusted her hat, while Pesquel-Duport’s mind turned to his own love, to his age, and to Clémence, almost as fresh as Henriette.

“She says that she will never love again,”

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he mused. "She has probably never been in love. She is younger, much younger, than her daughter."

The automobile rolled on. Henriette was silent, and turned a haggard face to the landscape.

Pesquel-Duport continued to himself:

"There is, of course, her enthusiasm for Guillaume. However, when these things are serious, they are hidden. But she is so new to the game that she is capable of loving without knowing it, of learning it more slowly than her daughter."

He wondered what line he should take.

This is what he planned.

His plan was severe, dangerous, and detestable. But he was in love, and love does not hamper itself by kindness, security, or delicacy.

He would inform Clémence that her daughter loved Guillaume, and urge her to give Henriette to the boy. Thus, on the one hand, he would see the effect of this news and whether

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it touched a mother or a rival, and on the other hand, he would not involve her too far since, as a last resort, the disclosure of Guillaume's true name and age would break the engagement. The director counted on this cleverly planned dénouement to cure Henriette.

That same evening, a friend who dined with them left for a concert, and they were alone. When Henriette had gone to her room, Pesquel-Duport carried out his program.

"Good Lord!" cried the princess. "The little fool! To love him and not tell me! But, director, I have been in the clouds. And Guillaume loves her? What joy! When I think that I was fool enough to marry Bormes! How stupid I am, how simple, how thoughtless! Why! . . . I deserve everything that people say of me."

Pesquel-Duport could not get over it. This woman was to baffle him forever.

Her effervescence prompted him to put on the brakes. He objected that she should wait,

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find out more about Guillaume. The question of money. . . .

“Money!” the princess interrupted. “Let that alone. In the first place, who ever told you that Guillaume was poor? The Fontenoyes are rich. I shall give Henriette whatever is necessary. Besides—” she burst into laughter—“we are losing our heads, my poor director. We are each as naïve as the other. Here we sit, talking seriously of a thing which does not exist. Henriette knows nothing about anything. Guillaume is nineteen years old. He is the first boy she has ever known. She thinks she is in love with him. She is not. I am in love with Guillaume, too, but that isn’t love.”

The princess looked very serious as she uttered these extravagant words. With her hand, she forbade Pesquel-Duport to open his mouth.

Listening to her, he felt his uneasiness return.

“I do not wish,” the princess continued, “to

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give away Henriette lightly, or to give Guillaume a wife who will tire of him after two weeks. You see me with a son-in-law on my hands!"

The word son-in-law applied to Guillaume threw her into a fresh burst of laughter.

"She is a madwoman," said Pesquel-Duport to himself seriously, "but a madwoman about whom I am crazy."

After her laughter, the princess asked for details. The director got mixed up, attenuated the scene in the automobile.

"Hold on," said Clémence. "You can write articles, and that is all. Be quiet. I know a simpler thing to do. I shall ask Henriette."

She rose and went out.

Pesquel-Duport let his face sink into his hands. This powerful man had tears in his eyes.

Of what good was his strength to him? You could not seize Clémence. She slipped, twisted, evaporated. He felt that she was unreal, without mass. He repeated to himself:

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"I am in love with a madwoman. I am in love with a fairy. Is she in love with Guillaume? No. She doesn't love anybody. She doesn't love herself. She doesn't love her daughter. She is neither coquette nor mother. She has another destiny that escapes me.

"In fact, it is even more simple. I call her fairy: she is merely light, as light as any one can be. Is she in love with Guillaume without knowing it? If she were, I should have a chance. She may be in love with me without knowing it. She may be in love with both of us."

Pesquel-Duport wandered, stumbled, turned in a circle.

When he awoke from the doze induced by the fire, he looked at his watch.

The princess had gone in to see Henriette at eleven o'clock. It was now one in the morning. It had seemed to him five minutes. For pain, doubt, and even a grate fire cut up time according to their fancy.

Pesquel-Duport was sufficiently at home

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in the avenue Montaigne to disregard convention. He went to listen at the young girl's door, heard sobs, knocked, and entered.

Madame de Bormes was sitting on the bed. Mother and daughter were kissing one another and weeping.

"Come in! Come in quickly!" exclaimed the princess. "Come tell this little love-lorn girl that she shall have her Guillaume, that she shall be his wife, that I promise it."

As the visit to the North front receded, the princess had begun to be bored.

Her daughter saved her.

On the morning after the avowal, she looked five years younger than the night before.

Henriette kissed her, caressed her, admired this masterpiece: a mother who, instead of sermonizing, of breaking the urge of youth, imprinted upon it a more vivid impulse.

After an interminable conference in the

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course of which everybody gave his opinion, it was decided that Henriette should write to Guillaume. The princess thought it quite normal that a woman should take the first step.

She would add a postscript to the letter which would take from it any appearance of secrecy.

"Don't worry," she said to Henriette. "I shan't read the letter."

Henriette locked herself in her room, looked at Guillaume's picture, and wrote:

"MY DEAR GUILLAUME:

"I do not know how to begin this letter. I want to write a short letter because I am not clever and what I have to say is very simple. My dear Guillaume, do not take any risks. I love you *too*.

"I do not mean that I love you as mamma loves you or as I love mamma. I love you as your sweetheart. I am sick about it and very happy. But I am afraid.

"I knew it was delicacy kept you away from

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here from your sincere joy when you saw us arrive at La Panne. For if you had wanted to run away from us for other reasons our surprise would have been disagreeable to you instead.

“My dear Guillaume, mamma and I were happy to hear the soldiers praise you, but I don’t need them to know you.

“I am afraid that you expose yourself more than you have to and that you risk your life ten times while the others risk theirs once.

“The reason why I am writing this letter which is so hard and gives me so much trouble, because I would much prefer to speak to you and hold your hand, is because I want you to take care of yourself for me, for us, for our future. Mamma is so good. You could never imagine how good she is. She allowed me to write to you and told me to write quickly so that we might save time.

“My dear Guillaume, answer me. Tell me if you love me as I love you and if you are glad to know that mamma has given her consent to our happiness.

“I must leave you because I want to cry and

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I should go on repeating the same thing. My dear Guillaume.

“I kiss you.”

Without reading this letter, the princess added at the bottom of the sheet:

“So this is what you’re up to!”

At six in the evening, as soon as Pajot had been buried, his belongings put into order, and the necessary papers made out, Roy and Guillaume went back to the lines to relieve Combescure, who had replaced Roy for twenty-four hours.

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They went up on foot, for the car which might have carried them as far as the Nieuportville Bridge had been hit by a shell and its motor demolished near the Triangular Wood.

The road was now less difficult for Roy than when, accompanied by his men, he carried slung about him as from a greased pole, a load of heavy objects. He went on as if out for a walk, but his load was of another kind. His heart weighed heavier than a pack.

And yet, the dead counted for little in this sector.

Despite the fact that civil death is distributed to all of us, it preserves none the less its prestige. Sometimes, death even awards certificates of good conduct during life. Well, we think in spite of ourselves, this man has just died. He is dead after all. Plainly, then, he was no ordinary man. He was perhaps a better man than he seemed to be.

But at the front, as if the frequency of death, the wounds, and the uninterrupted risk made

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each man die several times over, death had become small change and had lost its value.

It was quoted at the lowest possible rates.

Therefore, the dialect of the sector seemed inhuman to him who came from the death-is-rare country.

In fact, nobody said: "Poor So-and-so," but "He should have got under cover."

They spoke of shells as we speak of the autobus, of those dangers of Paris which the near-sighted and the rustic cannot escape.

Pajot's death was an exception to the rule. It amputated the body of the marines at the villa of one of its members, and Roy was indirectly the cause of the amputation.

"I killed him," he said, "as much as if my flashlight had been a gun."

This circumstance was enough to lend to Pajot's end the gravity of a civil death.

Therefore, Guillaume and Roy crossed the country in silence. The wind stirred up an ember of plaintive sound in the little glass insulators that the telegraph poles, like so many

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lilies of the valley, carry at the tips of their stalks.

Roy, whose mother was a Breton, was superstitious. He heard Pajot's soul complaining.

He squeezed and pinched Guillaume's arm, and bit his lips like a child trying not to cry.

To go back to Saint-Georges was to go back to the scene of the crime. He was glad of the mishap to the automobile because it put off the evil moment.

Plead as Guillaume might that it was a coincidence, that there were stray bullets flying, that it would have been impossible to aim at a head visible only for one second, Roy persisted in his remorse.

"His family," he murmured. "His poor family. He was going to see his family. He begged me not to be a fool. It is too awful."

Suddenly there broke out in the darkness an extraordinary music. It was the *nouba*, the band, of the black troops. They were going through Coxyde-ville.

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The *nouba* is composed of a sort of native flute which the soldiers imitate by stopping their noses and singing in a falsetto voice while rapping on their Adam's apple. This nasal flute plays *solo* a high-pitched, funereal air. It sounds like the voice of Jezebel. The drums and the horns reply to it.

The troops approached like the procession of the Ark of the Covenant on the road to Jerusalem. Roy and Guillaume stood side by side to watch them pass.

Dulled by cold and weariness, the negroes were coming from Dunkerque. They were covered with shawls, mantillas, mittens, sacks, bowls, cartridges, guns, *spolia opima*, amulets, glass necklaces, and bracelets of teeth.

The lower part of their bodies marched; the upper danced to the music. It sustained them, lifted them. Their heads, their arms, their shoulders, their bellies, moved, cradled softly by this wild opium. They were marching out of step, and their feet dragged in the mud. Whenever they stopped singing, there was a

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sound of feet churning mud, and of gun butts knocking against gas-mask containers; then the solo would come out of the depths of the desert, out of the recesses of the ages, saluted by the horns and drums.

The *nouba* amused Guillaume, but it dug into his comrade's heart. Its funereal wail accompanied his sorrow. He saw once more his voyages with Pajot, their ship, the ports of call, the sprees in the harbors of the Orient.

They started again without exchanging a word.

The Triangular Wood thundered like a royal hunt. At Nieuport, the marine's cemetery lay near the shapeless church. Beyond Nieuport, from the trench which led to Saint-Georges, there emerged from the flood on the right the carcass of a farm called *la Vache-Crevée*.

The author of this nickname, which was used on the general staff maps, was a young Englishwoman, Miss Elizabeth Hart.

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Miss Hart, whom everybody called Miss Elizabeth, was the daughter of the general commanding the British troops in the sector.

On the pretext of Red Cross service, she drove a pocket ambulance and lived with the marines.

In a French girl, this would have been shocking. But Elizabeth Hart was a tomboy, a devil. She all but dressed as a sailor. She wore her hair short; it curled about the face of an angel.

She had more than one trait in common with the modern amazons of the American films, but she was never seen to tremble. She came and went between La Panne and the lines, leaving her car anywhere, as if she were in the streets of London. Her nerve annoyed the colonel of the Zouaves. He thought she was too free and easy. Therefore, she neglected the sea sector for the flood sector.

The marines made a saint of her.

She was, without any doubt, a heroine, the

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first condition of heroism being free will, disobedience, absurdity, the exceptional.

What is more, she was a palmist.

When Guillaume and Roy arrived at Saint-Georges, she was seated in Roy's shelter, drinking port wine with Combescure. She had just returned from a long leave and had not yet met Guillaume. She spoke French with an agreeable accent.

Careful of the pronunciation of our "r" and unable to sound it in the throat, she rolled it on the end of her tongue. She scolded Roy for his scruples.

Combescure wanted her to read Guillaume's palm.

The task of a sincere chiromancer at the front is thorny. She drew back. Guillaume insisted.

On seeing the palm of Guillaume's hand, the young Englishwoman's face expressed such astonishment that Combescure and Roy asked her the reason.

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"My word!" replied Elizabeth. "I have never seen such a hand. It has no life line; there are several of them."

"And my death, or, my deaths?" Guillaume asked.

"You know," said she, "I'm not very good at this. I see it as a whole. As a whole, it's very good."

Combescure and Miss Hart left. She was driving him as far as Coxyde.

"What a woman!" said Guillaume to Roy. "She's a marvel."

"Another victim of Elizabeth. Her dead are too many to count," the young captain joked. "She has a brave heart, and what is worth a thousand times more, a great heart."

He wanted to be silent. Guillaume understood. Roy's orders given, he proposed a game of cards.

Captain Roy's shelter was the only habitable one at Saint-Georges. The water rendered earthworks almost impossible. It provided an

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excuse for the mad carelessness of the marines. Compared to the Zouaves' trenches, their system of shelter was as a wild beehive to a cultivated one.

It was neither fireproof nor waterproof.

This carelessness on the part of men always cradled by billow and hammock, nay, by the contagion transmitted by those who had been to sea to those who had never sailed, was increased by the fact that one hour of bombardment demolished the work of five weeks.

Often, after the Germans had essayed an attack, the Zouaves suffered less from their wounds than in their self-esteem as architects.

It was only the affection of the marines for their chiefs which had prompted them to build a cabin with their astounding dress-makers' hands which can make a marvel of elegance out of a tam and a red pompon, and can knot a cord to resemble the initials of lovers.

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This segment, then, was very dangerous, and they lost many men in it.

Roy wished for silence and played in silence.

Outside, they heard from time to time those shots which seemed to be fired only to keep the war going.

A round of shots sounded, fired very near them.

It continued. Roy put down his hand and went to inquire.

"That," he said to Guillaume, taking up his cards again, "is our friends amusing themselves. Plouardec and Lulu are playing *manille* in their listening post. They had the idea of announcing their points by rifle shots. Their idea of economy. I have made them stop it."

The marines do not bear the same relations to their officers as other soldiers, whom they nicknamed "the warriors." For example, they salute their officers the way infantry acknowl-

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edge salutes from second-class privates, adding to their gesture a little friendly grin.

Twelve minutes after Roy's remonstrance, the rifle shots commenced again at full blast.

Roy smiled, furious.

"This time," he said, "they've overstepped the bounds. I'm going to punish them. Come along, Guillaume."

They were going up to the platform leading to the listening posts, when a voice, distant but clear and strong, arose:

"You scamps!" it yelled in excellent French. "Think you're funny to keep people from sleeping in peace, eh! Wait till I let your officers know."

"Let your officers know" meant "order firing."

"They're firing by my orders!" shouted Roy.

Everything, German voice and fusillade, lapsed into silence.

Sanctions on both sides stopped there.

This dialogue will hardly be credited by people ignorant of the neighborly spirit en-

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gendered by a long war, and of the family spirit of the marines.

The game of cards went on interminably until the telephone hissed. Roy unhooked the receiver. He could not hear clearly. The wires, laid any which way, were crossed and touched one another. The hum of the sector inhabited the instrument as the sound of the sea lives in a shell.

"Impossible to understand a word," said Roy. "I'm going to hang up. I get only one thing, in dribbles: it is that post F (post F was five kilometers away) can't send me any one with the message. I have no one to send myself. The communicating trenches were shot up by torpedoes the day before yesterday. The longest part of them is uncovered. I don't want to send one of my lads for a message. My idiots have no idea of danger. They don't want to take the long way around, and they won't understand that one doesn't whistle,

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nor imitate the barking of a dog, nor get nervy, within thirty yards of the Germans."

"That's very simple," said Guillaume, then. "I don't whistle, and I don't imitate dogs. When I have to, I can crawl. I'll only need to go the long way around. I'm going."

Roy refused to let him go. Guillaume insisted. As Roy wanted secretly to be alone with his anguish, as the long way around was not dangerous, and as Guillaume was inwardly in high glee over this night raid, they ended by agreeing.

Guillaume would go and would return immediately with Roy's message.

The cold night was sown with white rockets and stars. For the first time, Guillaume found himself alone at the front. A last curtain arose. Child and fairy were blended into one. Guillaume finally knew love.

Instead of taking the roundabout way, he followed the parapet of the first line as far as

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the dyke, where he had to creep. Breuil and he were masters at this redskin game.

After several yards, he came upon a corpse.

A soul had left this corpse in haste, as well as it was able. He inspected it with a hard, inquisitive eye.

He went on. He crossed other corpses, thrown off by the massacre as a drunkard, undressing, throws off his collar, shoes, tie, and shirt.

The mud made progress on all fours difficult. Sometimes he seemed to be walking on velvet; at other times, the mud tried to hold him with the smacking kiss of a nursemaid.

Guillaume stopped, waited, and started again. He was living now with all his being.

He was thinking neither of Henriette nor of Madame de Bormes when, suddenly, a vision of Madame de Bormes flashed into his mind.

He recognized, disfigured by the torpedoes, that part of the trench where, a few days before, she had complained of her anguish.

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"Just the same," he said to himself, "we've been in luck. We always think this sector is too quiet. The princess's instinct was better than ours. You would almost say that she had foreseen the death of this trench."

A heap of *chevaux de frise* and barbed wire obstructed his passage. To pass on the left, one had to go into water up to the hips. Guillaume went to the right.

He came out on solid ground, and was congratulating himself on the complete absence of rockets when he stopped short.

At some distance in front of him, he distinguished the mass of an enemy patrol.

The patrol saw Guillaume and did not stir. It thought itself invisible.

Guillaume's heart jumped in cadence, beating like the muffled blows of a miner in the depths of a mine.

Immobility became intolerable to him. He thought he heard a challenge.

"Fontenoy!" he screamed, transforming his imposture into a war cry. And he added jok-

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ingly as he ran at full speed: "Guillaume II!"

Guillaume flew, bounded, falling forward like a hare.

Hearing no shots, he stopped and turned, out of breath.

At that moment he felt a terrible blow in the chest. He fell. He became deaf, blind.

"A bullet," he said to himself. "*I am lost if I don't pretend to be dead.*"

But in him, fiction and reality were the same.

Guillaume Thomas was dead.

The first in Paris to learn the news was Pesquel-Duport. At least, it was probably

so. He was informed as the organizer of the welfare huts.

This great-hearted man could not believe the thing, despite the proofs.

He foresaw the thunderclap of this news in the avenue Montaigne. He suffered for the suffering of Madame de Bormes.

What he would not admit to himself, or only half admitted, was that this death was a terrible solution, but none the less a solution. It put a final end to the adventure, and allowed him to keep the secret of the Fontenoy lie.

"Poor Guillaume," he said to himself. "The false uncle would not refuse to acknowledge such a nephew. Killed in the North, he deserves the epitaph of the child Septentrio: *He danced two days and gave pleasure.*"

His aunt and the two women would have to be told. The director, who wished to delay the second step but did not wish that the unhappy women learn of the disaster indirectly, decided to go first to see Guillaume's aunt, and then to the avenue Montaigne.

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He counted without Madame Valiche.

While he was performing his sad mission in Montmartre and Mademoiselle Thomas, after a silence, was speaking these words which astonished the unbeliever: "Thank you, Sir. I shall see him soon. I shall tell him of your visit:" Madame Valiche was turning into the avenue Montaigne at the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées.

She had not been able to swallow the trip to the lines, the compartment, the triumph of the princess, or the fact that the convoy had been disbanded by Guillaume's whim.

Her revenge was active.

This vampire knew all the dead from Belgium to Alsace, before anybody else. She learned of Guillaume's end from a brother of Gentil who was a doctor at Zuydecote and had arrived on leave that very morning.

He had offered her the news in this fashion: "A nervy kid who only got what he deserved." Thus she was bringing it, still hot, to Henriette and to Madame de Bormes.

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These women, who dared not leave the apartment for too long a time in fear of missing Guillaume's answer to Henriette's letter by one minute, were on their way out to do a few errands.

They met Madame Valiche in the lower hall. Her grave air frightened them. They returned with her to the drawing-room.

Madame Valiche knew how to use the knife.

"I told you so," she said simply.

Henriette was the first to divine the tragedy. She leaped at Madame Valiche.

In the space of one second, the horrible woman finished off her victims. When Pesquel-Duport entered the drawing-room, the slaughter was done.

Madame de Bormes and her daughter were screaming and tearing their clothes. Standing facing them, Madame Valiche was inventing details.

Pesquel-Duport seized her by her gown.

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"You . . . !" You . . . !" he choked. "You are going to do me the pleasure of getting out of here! Immediately!"

He shook her and dragged her to the door of the hallway. He could have crushed her.

He threw her out.

What was that to Madame Valiche? She straightened her hat, ran down the steps four at a time, and flew home.

Gentil, at table, was attacking the *hors d'œuvre*.

"Applaud me!" she cried from the doorway. "I have seen what I wished to see. Mother and daughter. Double shot."

She hoped finally to dazzle this man whom she adored, who profited by her and knew the influence of feigned impassiveness on hysterical natures.

"High society morals," he said briefly, buttering his bread.

Madame Valiche, drunk with love and satisfied hate, contemplated this man who ate and lived superior to astonishment.

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“Doctor,” she stammered, “you are a god.”

“There are no gods, Madame. I see things clearly. That is all.”

Mademoiselle de Bormes could not endure the result of the shock.

Madame de Bormes took her to a sanitarium in Auteuil. She died two months later of a nervous illness which was not mortal. That is to say, in spite of all precautions, she poisoned herself.

Over night, her mother grew old. She saw only Pesquel-Duport.

“Let us get married,” he would say. “You cannot live alone.”

“Wait,” the princess would answer. “Now

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it is you who are too young. We haven't much luck with our ages. But they will meet one of these days."

At Nieuport, near the church, the marines' cemetery is a brig adrift.

A broken mast marks its center.

Does this brig carry opium? A deep slumber envelops the crew.

Each grave displays a pretty decoration of shells, stones, old andirons, old frames, old balusters. One of them bears the name of Jacques Roy.

Jacques Roy died at the end of four hours in the Nieuport first-aid station of a wound taken at Saint-Georges, happy in avenging

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Pajot and Guillaume, whom he imagined to have been killed by his fault.

His cross bears the official inscription.

But on the next cross, you may read:

“G. T. DE FONTENOY. Died for us.”

THE END

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